

1 NATIONAL FOOD STAMP CONVERSATION 2000  
2 Sharing a History of Accomplishment and Targeting  
3 Opportunities for Improvement  
4 U.S. Department of Agriculture  
5 Food, Nutrition, and Consumer Services  
6 Summer 2000  
7  
8 Under Secretary Shirley R. Watkins  
9 Sam Chambers, Administrator  
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11  
12 July 20, 2000  
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1                   UNDER SECRETARY WATKINS: What is it that  
2                   you would like for us to do with this wonderful  
3                   federal program to make it the very best?

4                   The Food Stamp Program is the cornerstone of  
5                   our nutrition assistance programs in the federal  
6                   government and it's our way of moving people to self  
7                   sufficiency. We do want to be responsive. We want to  
8                   make certain that the program meets the needs of  
9                   people and that this program that is a nutrition  
10                  assistance program and not a welfare program. It is  
11                  designed to be the original intent of the people who  
12                  developed this program many, many, many, many, many  
13                  years ago. And one of the things I wanted to do is to  
14                  make sure that as we talked about reauthorization,  
15                  that we got input from people around this country.  
16                  It's all right for me to sit there and think about all  
17                  the wonderful things that I would like to see the  
18                  program be and design, but that simply is not enough.  
19                  We need to have input from participants in the  
20                  program, from those people who work in the program;  
21                  the case workers, the administrators of the program,  
22                  those people at the state and the federal level. And  
23                  it takes all of us working together to make certain  
24                  that we can provide that kind of program assistance  
25                  and support in order that we have a good program. And



1       that's why I think it's wonderful to be running around  
2       the country trying to hear from everyone and seek your  
3       input.

4               Before we get under way -- and I want to  
5       apologize to you for being just a little bit late -- I  
6       never knew I could wolf down a sandwich as fast as I  
7       did just a few minutes ago after coming from another  
8       meeting. You try to cram in as much as you can. And  
9       the waiter said, "Next time you come into a  
10      restaurant, and I hope you come back, we'll treat you  
11      a little bit better." And I felt real sorry for him  
12      because we were asking him to fix us a sandwich in  
13      about five minutes and we eat it in about two.

14             Before we get into listening to you, let me  
15      just explain a few things. And I know you have gotten  
16      some information outside about the program. I would  
17      just like to kind of start out with the original  
18      intent of the program and how this program got  
19      started. And I guess you could say the Food Stamp  
20      Program started in The Depression. And the original  
21      intent that was stated in the Food Stamp Act was to  
22      strengthen the agricultural economy, achieve a more  
23      effective use of off abundances and to improve or to  
24      provide for improved levels of nutrition among low  
25      income households. And that is why we think it's so



1       important that everybody know that this program is not  
2       a welfare program but a nutrition assistance program.  
3       And we are trying to make certain that people  
4       understand that people understand that we're taking it  
5       back to the original intent of the program.

6               The program as we know it today began as a  
7       pilot project in 1961 and it was made permanent in  
8       1964. Then the program expanded dramatically in 1974  
9       when Congress required all of the states to make food  
10      stamps available to low income households. The Food  
11      Stamp Act of 1977 made significant changes in the  
12      program, made changes in the regulations. It  
13      tightened the eligibility criteria. It tightened the  
14      administration and it moved the requirement that food  
15      stamps had to be purchased by recipients. And since  
16      then the program has grown. And I guess the largest  
17      point in the history was when we served some 28  
18      million participants and that was in March of 1994.  
19      And the current participation ranging somewhere  
20      between 18 million to something like 20 million.

21             Let me give you an idea of who the people  
22      are that participate in the program. The Food Stamp  
23      households are diverse. It's a wide-ranging group.  
24      They represent a broad cross-section of the nation's  
25      low income population. But over half of the





1 recipients are children and another eight percent are  
2 age 60 and older. The majority of the households do  
3 not receive TAP benefits. They receive cash  
4 assistance from SSI, that's Supplement Social Security  
5 Income, Social Security and State General Assistance.  
6 Nine percent of the people who participate in the Food  
7 Stamp Program have no income of any kind. Twenty-six  
8 percent of the recipients work, and for these  
9 households, those earnings are the primary source of  
10 family income.

11 If a person works, they are still eligible  
12 for Food Stamp benefits. Only ten percent of those  
13 working families -- and I repeat that -- only ten  
14 percent of those working families make enough to put  
15 them above the poverty line. And 37 percent are at or  
16 below the poverty line. The average Food Stamp  
17 household has only \$118 in accountable resources,  
18 including vehicles, checking and saving accounts.  
19 The average Food Stamp household is small. And I  
20 always laugh when I start to say this, the household  
21 is about a 2.4, and I don't know where that "4" is --  
22 members. The households with children is relatively  
23 large, averaging about 3.3 members. Households with  
24 elderly participants are smaller with an average size  
25 of 1.3 members.



1                   We recently hosted the National Nutrition  
2                   Summit in Washington and we had two break-out  
3                   sessions. And people had an opportunity to discuss  
4                   issues and data and we had an opportunity to listen to  
5                   the variety of speakers. The first session, we called  
6                   it Faces of Hunger in America. And one of our guests  
7                   was Sharon Thornberry (phonetic). She was a former  
8                   WIC recipient and food stamp recipient. And we were  
9                   all struck by Sharon's presentation and the things  
10                  that she said. Sharon said that these programs did  
11                  make her independent. They did not make her  
12                  dependent. They helped her to succeed. Sharon is now  
13                  self-reliant, self-sufficient, self-confident and she  
14                  said she owed it all to the success of her support  
15                  that she got from the Food Stamp Program.

16                 And I think as we go through these  
17                 discussions today, I hope you will keep Sharon's words  
18                 in mind. We have to make sure that the Food Stamp  
19                 Program continues to help people succeed and that we  
20                 are helping them in any way we can. I hope that the  
21                 suggestions we get from you today and from all of  
22                 those people that we have heard from already in  
23                 Washington and in Atlanta that these series of  
24                 conversations will help us to stay on track as we work  
25                 on reauthorization. All of you have the hand-outs, so



1 if you didn't, be sure to pick up one at break.

2 We have the guiding principles of the Food  
3 Stamp Program and I hope you have a chance to reach  
4 those guiding principles because we want to bear in  
5 mind that the improved nutritional well-being is the  
6 ultimate measure of success in our fight to reduce  
7 hunger and improve nutrition. And that's the  
8 principal foundation and the heart and soul of the  
9 original intent of the framers of the Food Stamp  
10 Program. And this is at the core of why we are here  
11 and why we are working so hard to listen to you as you  
12 help us to frame how the Food Stamp Program can be  
13 enhanced. Reauthorization, again, is 2002 and it's  
14 especially important that we do everything to make  
15 this program strong and responsive. And for me, I  
16 hope we can make it simpler for people to understand  
17 and to administer as well as for people to be able to  
18 apply to a simplified version of the Food Stamp  
19 Program.

20 We still have Chicago, Kansas City, Los  
21 Angeles and Dallas to visit and we will be visiting  
22 those over the next month and a half. We will wind up  
23 the conversations in Los Angeles. And just so you  
24 know, we hope to have these conversations completed by  
25 the end of August and then begin drafting the



1 framework for what this regulation is going to look  
2 like when it's presented to Congress in 2002.

3 I want to thank you again for your interest  
4 and your concern in the Food Stamp Program and I know  
5 you have come a long way to be here with us. And just  
6 so you kind of know what the format is going to be and  
7 some other information, I'd ask Sam Chambers our  
8 administrator to give us some directions, and then,  
9 Sam, we'll be ready to kick it off.

10 SAM CHAMBERS: Thank you, Under Secretary  
11 Watkins and thank you all, our guests, for your  
12 participation and attendance here. I have to say to  
13 some of the people I was talking to a few minutes ago  
14 that we certainly are pleased that you could come, but  
15 we would be more pleased if you have any words of  
16 wisdom that you want to share, that you do that.

17 To facilitate that process we have asked our  
18 Northeast Region staff to arrange not only for the  
19 meeting itself but to arrange the microphones so that  
20 can be placed out in the auditorium -- as you can  
21 notice, they are in the walkways here -- and we would  
22 ask that those individuals who have comments that they  
23 would like to make, that you make them by using the  
24 microphones. This entire meeting is being transcribed  
25 so that we have a record of all the comments that are





1       made. Those individuals who want to speak were asked  
2       to sign in at the registration desk when you first  
3       arrived. The Under Secretary has a listing of those  
4       individuals by name and organization, so she knows who  
5       has indicated a willingness and an interest to speak.  
6       She is going to take those in the order in which the  
7       registrations were received and the names were listed.  
8       So please don't become overwrought if your name isn't  
9       called within the next 10 or 15 minutes. We do intend  
10      to be here long enough to get everybody's comments.  
11      And the meeting, as I indicated, will be transcribed.

12               For those individuals that want to leave  
13      written comments for us, you can certainly do that by  
14      leaving that with the individuals out at the  
15      registration and we will take those back with us.

16               In addition, we have made available today  
17      telephone service so that those individuals who could  
18      not be here for whatever reason, whether it be  
19      distance other scheduling problems or what have you  
20      who wanted to call in and make comments, they will be  
21      able to do that and the Under Secretary will take  
22      calls periodically throughout.

23               Finally, at the end of today's event, there  
24      will be an opportunity for those individuals who have  
25      additional thoughts that they want to make comments on



1 or provide comments to, to send that to us in writing  
2 at our national office care of the Food Stamp Program.  
3 It is our intention and I hope that we will receive  
4 and be able to receive as much thought and input from  
5 as many people representing as many sectors as  
6 possible so that the package of recommendations that  
7 is put forward is a representation of what we would  
8 think would be the best input that we could receive  
9 from as many callers as possible.

10 I think that pretty much covers the  
11 logistics for today. Again, we would ask that you be  
12 succinct in your comments. Please limit your verbal  
13 comment to three to five minutes so that we can get as  
14 many comments on the record as possible okay.

15 UNDER SECRETARY WATKINS: We also have an  
16 interpreter, Spanish and English, Teresa Bendita  
17 (phonetic). So if there is anyone who needs an  
18 interpreter, Teresa is down here and will be able to  
19 do that. So if you raise your hand and let us know  
20 that, we'll be providing that service for you.

21 Okay, I think we're ready to start. Let's  
22 start with Jan Pependick. I am going to have  
23 difficulty, I know, with names today, so please  
24 forgive me and we would ask that you repeat your name  
25 when you come to the microphone. And if you want to,



1       you can tell the name of your organization, but you do  
2       not have to.

3               Please state your name and we're ready to  
4       go.

5               JAN POPENDICK: I'm Jan Popenick and since  
6       I am the first speaker, I'm going to take the  
7       opportunity to welcome you to New York.

8               UNDER SECRETARY WATKINS: Thank you.

9               JAN POPENDICK: I am a professor of  
10       sociology at Hunter College, the City University of  
11       New York where I also served as director of the Center  
12       for the Study of Family Well-Being and I am the author  
13       of two books relevant to today's conversation; one is  
14       a "Bread Lines...", "Food Assistance and the Great  
15       Depression," and the other is "Sweet Charity;  
16       Emergency Food and the end of Entitlement." And I  
17       have my visual aid and you don't have a copy. I will  
18       find you one. But I will limit my remarks to my three  
19       to five minutes.

20               I asked to go first this afternoon but not  
21       for the traditional reason of getting it over with but  
22       rather because my comments are philosophical and  
23       historical in nature and really relate to the moral  
24       health of our society and the role of the Food Stamp  
25       Program as an expression of that moral health.



1                   Speaking as a sociologist, on the good news  
2                   side, I'm happy to tell you that poll after poll after  
3                   poll taken over the last few decades has indicated  
4                   clearly that the American people perceive hunger in  
5                   our midst as morally unacceptable, that they want it  
6                   ended and they are willing to pay additional taxes if  
7                   necessary to bring about it's end. The results of  
8                   these polls which have been conducted every six or  
9                   seven years are enormously consistent.

10                  Additional evidence, I think, of the  
11                  commitment of the American people to ending hunger in  
12                  our society can be seen in the tremendous outpouring  
13                  that we have seen in the charitable food sector, in  
14                  soup kitchens and food pantries and food banking and  
15                  food rescue programs. But these charitable food  
16                  programs are also, I think, an index of the failure,  
17                  in a sense, of our commitment in the public sector.

18                  The Food Stamp Program has been historically  
19                  the central expression of this country's determination  
20                  to prevent food insecurity and hunger among our  
21                  citizens. And there are really four characteristics  
22                  of the Food Stamp Program that are essential, I think,  
23                  to inviting this determination.

24                  Food stamps were created as a reaction to  
25                  the shortcomings of the surplus commodity approach to





1 preventing hunger, and, as such, they were created to  
2 mainstream the experience of poor people; to make the  
3 lives of people who need food assistance as much as  
4 possible like the lives of other consumers in America,  
5 and to make sure that they could acquire their food in  
6 the normal circumstances that we all turn to to  
7 acquire food; in the supermarkets and butchers and  
8 green grocers of this country.

9 Recently I think the Electronic Benefits  
10 Transfer -- and I know we'll be hearing more this  
11 afternoon about our experience with EBT here in the  
12 Northeast -- but the EBT has, if anything, increased  
13 the effectiveness of this aspect of the Food Stamp  
14 Program.

15 A second essential characteristic has been  
16 the establishment of national eligibility and benefit  
17 levels. It's the national uniformity in food stamps  
18 that allows the Food Stamp Program to serve as a  
19 necessary and essential counter balance to the  
20 outrageously disparate levels of assistance that are  
21 provided in the public assistance programs throughout  
22 the states. Food stamps has been the one program for  
23 very poor people that have balanced a bit the  
24 tremendous differences between high grant level states  
25 and those very low grant level states.



1           The national eligibility and benefits  
2 standards also have a fascinating history. When  
3 advocates first began to take a close look at the  
4 performance of the federal commodity programs, after  
5 the re-discovery of hunger in the late 60's, they  
6 found, for instance, a county in Indiana where you  
7 couldn't get commodities if your household had a dog.  
8 They have found another where you couldn't get  
9 commodities if there were a known alcoholic in the  
10 family, and one where you couldn't get commodities if  
11 there was a television set in the household.

12           It was to counteract this level of local  
13 discretion or this abuse of local discretion that the  
14 movement for national standards of eligibility was  
15 created. And in this time of diminution, we're  
16 counting on you to uphold the spirit of those national  
17 standards.

18           The third element that has been essential to  
19 the ability of the Food Stamp Program to embody this  
20 nation's determination that people not go hungry has  
21 been the extension which it was a non-categorical  
22 program. That is, you didn't have to have any  
23 particular household configuration. You just had to  
24 be in need. And as everyone in this audience knows,  
25 that fundamental principle was breached in the 1996



1 welfare revisions. And very high on my agenda with  
2 re-authorization would be to restore the  
3 non-categorical nature.

4           When you talk about the fundamental purchase  
5 of food stamps as being nutrition assistance, I think  
6 you have there the essential argument that you need.  
7 This is not a program from which people should be  
8 eliminated because they are able-bodied, unemployed  
9 adults without dependents or because they are  
10 immigrants who arrived after a certain date in this  
11 country or for any of the other categories that have  
12 been eliminated.

13           The fourth, and to my mind, philosophically,  
14 the single most important characteristic of the Food  
15 Stamp Program has been that it establishes rights and  
16 that these rights are protected by a due process  
17 procedure. It is the rights character of food stamps  
18 that distinguishes it from many other efforts to  
19 assist people in need in this society.

20           The moral philosopher, Ellen Buchanan has  
21 recently written that moral progress to a large extent  
22 consists of the expansion of the realm of justice into  
23 what we had previously believed to be the domain of  
24 charity. And if you look at the long history that you  
25 referred to, Under Secretary Watkins, of improving and



1       expanding food stamps from their re-creation in the  
2       early 60s through the elimination of the purchase  
3       requirement in the late 70s, it is very much a history  
4       of replacing what had been a haphazard pattern of  
5       local arrangements in charity with fundamental  
6       national public commitment.

7               I am concerned that in recent years we have  
8       seen a reversal of that moral progress. I guess you  
9       have to call it moral regress. And we have seen  
10      circumstance under circumstance that erodes access to  
11      these rights and therefore puts people back in the lap  
12      of charity. That's what the book "Sweet Charity" is  
13      fundamentally. And I won't go into the details now,  
14      but there are a couple of things I would like to point  
15      out.

16             It is in the context of protecting rights  
17      that I think that we need to look at the issue of  
18      effective outreach. They say if a tree falls in the  
19      forest and there is no one there to hear it, does it  
20      make a sound? Well, if I have a right and I don't  
21      know about it, I am not effectively informed about how  
22      to implement it, is it really an effective right?

23             Increasingly, as soup kitchens and food  
24      pantries do studies to find out why people are turning  
25      up at their doors, they find people who don't know





1       that they are eligible for food stamps or whose  
2       effective access to food stamps has been restricted by  
3       the way in which they were treated when they tried to  
4       apply for them. And I think everyone here wants to  
5       congratulate the USDA for intervening here in New York  
6       when we had as a matter of public policy a diversion  
7       of people from the application process. And I'm sure  
8       you will hear more on that latter.

9               But I feel that in order for food stamps to  
10       accomplish it's fundamental purpose, we need to  
11       reconsider the role of outreach, of communication and  
12       of a variety of strategies that could overcome stigma  
13       to making the rights real and accessible to people who  
14       have them.

15              There is another set of processes at work in  
16       our society that are undermining the capacity of the  
17       Food Stamp Program to accomplish it's fundamental  
18       goals. In addition to the abrogation of rights by  
19       local officials in some cases or by unacceptable  
20       behavior by frontline employees and others, we have  
21       broad processes in social change that are in effect  
22       making obsolete the original formula on which food  
23       stamps were contrived or calculated. The formula that  
24       said well, poor people spend a certain amount of their  
25       income on food so we'll figure out the cost of the



1       minimal diet and multiply it by three and that will be  
2       the eligibility levels. It's the same way we  
3       calculate the poverty level in this society. And it  
4       may have made sense when people typically could  
5       acquire housing for a quarter of their income, but now  
6       that lower income people are paying 50, 60, 70 percent  
7       of their income for housing, the fundamental formula  
8       is obsolete. And as you approach re-authorization, I  
9       hope that you will take a close look at that  
10      multiplier as well as at the food plan.

11                UNDER SECRETARY WATKINS: Thank you very  
12      much. And I would hope that you could wrap it up and  
13      then if you wanted to send us, we would appreciate you  
14      sending us some written comments.

15                JAN POPENDICK: Well, I do have one remark  
16      and it's very specific to what we face here in New  
17      York with the energy price increase. Anyone who has  
18      been involved with not only food assistance in the  
19      public sector, but also the pantries and kitchens  
20      knows that every time there is a jump in energy  
21      prices, we get more people in need. And your formula  
22      for updating the cost of the Thrifty Food Plan always  
23      experiences a lag. That lag will be more damaging  
24      than ever when the impact of fuel prices on food  
25      prices takes full effect, as it will over the next



1 year.

2 UNDER SECRETARY WATKINS: Thank you very  
3 much. Colleen Pawling.

4 COLLEEN PAWLING: My name is Colleen  
5 Pawling. I am the Food Stamp specialist with the  
6 Nutrition Consortium of New York State which is a  
7 statewide anti-hunger organization based Buffalo. And  
8 I was asked to just supply a little bit of background  
9 about what is happening specifically in New York State  
10 in the Food Stamp Program.

11 New York is a relatively wealthy state, but  
12 that doesn't mean that we're not hungry. The Food and  
13 Household Judiciary Study did show that about over 10  
14 percent of households are hungry or food insecure in  
15 New York State. And as Jan was saying, the emergency  
16 food program, the charitable system shouldn't be  
17 expected to pick up the burden of feeding the poor,  
18 but they can't. And one survey that was done last  
19 year in one month alone and in New York City alone  
20 showed that the EFPs had turned away over 74,000  
21 people who came to them for help in one month because  
22 they simply can't handle the demand that has been  
23 increasing since the Food Stamp participation is  
24 dropping.

25 Unemployment - I hear it's down to four



1       percent in the country. Well, it's not down to that  
2       in New York State. We still have several counties  
3       Upstate that have double digit unemployment. Since  
4       1996 unemployment has only dropped 15 percent. Food  
5       Stamp participation has dropped 33.3 percent. People,  
6       when they give unemployment, we know that they don't  
7       go into high paying jobs. New York State did a study  
8       recently of families -- I guess, since 1997 --  
9       families leaving TANF and they followed them for a  
10      year after they left. And in the year after  
11      households left, the median income Upstate of those  
12      households was \$7,974. And in the city, \$12,611. So  
13      we would expect those families should be going off PA  
14      food stamps and onto non-PA food stamps. And we would  
15      expect to see an increase in non-PA Food Stamp  
16      participation, but that has not happened.

17               After a year only 23 percent of those  
18      families who were participating in the Food Stamp  
19      Program, 13 percent have returned to TANF, so only  
20      about 10 percent of them would have been still off  
21      TANF and receiving food stamps. There has been a 20  
22      percent drop in non-PA Food Stamp participation in the  
23      last four years and a 33 percent drop overall. So the  
24      non-PA is not dropping as fast as the PA or TANF  
25      participation, but it's still dropping. And that's an





1       indication that when people are leaving TANF, they are  
2       not getting food stamps as part of their support  
3       package when they leave. And I know that this is not  
4       only true to New York, it's true all over the country.  
5       But speaking for New York, I know that we need to do a  
6       better job of making that transition.

7               And as Jan was saying just at the end of her  
8       remarks, this assumption that 30 percent of your  
9       income is available for food just simply doesn't work  
10      anymore. New York State food stamp recipients have  
11      the highest shelter cost of the country. The average  
12      shelter cost is \$510 a month. The average total gross  
13      household income for Food Stamp households is \$63 a  
14      month. So that leaves \$113 for all of the other  
15      household expenses, which obviously is not going to go  
16      toward food. So, as a result, people -- this is why  
17      people end up as at EFPs.

18             You mentioned something in your opening  
19      remarks about the Food Stamp Program leading to  
20      self-sufficiency and I think that self-sufficiency is  
21      an important goal, but I think we need to re-think the  
22      way we look at self-sufficiency. When we talk about  
23      self-sufficiency in anti-hunger program, the way the  
24      Food Stamp Program helps people become self-sufficient  
25      is by reducing hunger because hungry children don't



1 learn. Hungry workers are not effective. Hungry  
2 employees don't keep their jobs because they are not  
3 able to succeed. And by reducing hunger we enable  
4 people to be successful in their endeavors and to  
5 become self-sufficient. And I think that most of us  
6 who are honest will look at the Food Stamp employment  
7 programs and admit that they are not the most  
8 effective ways of getting people into employment that  
9 we have in this country. And it's obvious that they  
10 wouldn't be because it's a nutrition program. It's  
11 not an employment program. The whole idea that we  
12 ought to expect our nutrition programs to get people  
13 jobs is somehow kind of bizarre and I think it needs  
14 to be revisited. The Food Stamp Program is a  
15 wonderful tool toward self sufficiency because it  
16 reduces hunger, improves nutrition and makes it  
17 possible for people to be successful.

18 Our organization with the Hunger Action  
19 Network and Census and Greater Upstate Law Project is  
20 in the middle of doing a survey of participants,  
21 County and Food Stamp Program administrators and  
22 advocates to look at the reasons why people don't  
23 participate. And we asked at the very end of the  
24 questionnaire for the participants and  
25 non-participants the question "What should we know



1       about the Food Stamp Program?" And I would like to  
2       read you just a few of the remarks that people wrote.

3               WATKINS: That's fine if you can do it  
4       quickly.

5               COLLEEN PAWLING: "There should be a more  
6       careful review of the program because people like  
7       myself in Elmira don't have enough to eat, nor do we  
8       have money to pay our bills and buy food. Everything  
9       is high and \$11.73 is not enough to do this. I have  
10      to borrow money from my friends to keep eating and pay  
11      my bills on time, and that's when everything goes  
12      well."

13              Another person wrote, "it doesn't give  
14      enough money. Pantry should be the supplement, not  
15      the main source of food." And that's one thing you  
16      see throughout is that a lot of people think of the  
17      Food Pantry as being a source of food and the food  
18      stamps as a last resort.

19              And one more quote: "I may be wrong but I  
20      wanted to continue getting food stamps. I would have  
21      had to get a job. I was going to college at the time.  
22      If I had gone to work to qualify, I would have had to  
23      quit college. I am trying to better myself."

24              And that's the whole point about the work  
25      requirements. A lot of times the rules interfere with



1 people doing the things that would help them become  
2 self-sufficient. And we need to make the program more  
3 supportive of people who are trying to become  
4 self-sufficient.

5 Thank you.

6 UNDER SECRETARY WATKINS: Thank you,  
7 Colleen.

8 We have a call waiting, Edward Holtz  
9 (phonetic).

10 EDWARD HOLTZ: My name is Edward Holtz.  
11 The issues that I have that I wanted to discuss about  
12 the Food Stamp Program and how to improve the program.  
13 First one would be increase the value of vehicles for  
14 families and households that have employable members.  
15 In other words, we have had numbers of people who were  
16 denied food stamps because their vehicle is over the  
17 \$4,650 deduction. I think that's an issue with the  
18 employability rule that would impact families.

19 The second thing would be standardized  
20 verification forms. I work in more than one County  
21 and counties seem to develop their own forms for  
22 verification and the list becomes much longer and they  
23 require several documents to verify the same  
24 information and I think if it was state forms used by  
25 each County it would help to reduce the number of





1 issues that we have of verification. Verification is  
2 a huge issue on our part when we're trying to help  
3 welfare recipients.

4 The third issue, I would suggest eliminating  
5 finger imaging completely. People that are hungry  
6 aren't criminals. There is other ways to verify  
7 information without finger printing households.  
8 Families feel very much intimidated by that process.  
9 They feel like criminals. They feel that there is  
10 something wrong. And also I think that and also just  
11 reports about pride indicate that there is very little  
12 pride in the Food Stamp system. Finger imaging seems  
13 to be something that is just very much beyond what is  
14 necessary.

15 The fourth issue I would like to speak about  
16 would be the Thrifty Food Plan. I believe it's not  
17 adequate for the rising cost of food. With the price  
18 of food, it still seems to be beyond what -- families  
19 still need to put in more than 30 percent of their  
20 income just to keep their nutritional needs as a  
21 family.

22 Those are the four issues that I would like  
23 to be changed in the Food Stamp Program.

24 UNDER SECRETARY WATKINS: Thanks, Ed.

25 Okay, Heidi Dorow.







1 administration deny eligible individuals access to the  
2 Food Stamp Program, violating their human rights.  
3 This denial of access has lead to increasing hunger in  
4 New York City and is a violation of both federal and  
5 international law. The important thing about  
6 international law is that it requires government not  
7 to interfere in people's access to food and insure  
8 that everyone is at a minimum free from hunger.

9 Now, what this reports doesn't document is  
10 that the Human Resources Administration denies access,  
11 right, and in addition to that the denial of access  
12 leads to increased hunger, thereby a violation of  
13 international law.

14 Our report, "Hunger Is No Accident"  
15 highlights several alarming points related to the Food  
16 Stamp Program. As other advocates here will document  
17 today, there is an increase in demand at emergency  
18 food providers. Our colleagues, the New York City  
19 Coalition Against Hunger estimate that the demand for  
20 emergency food in New York City increased 24 percent  
21 in 1997 and 36 percent in 1998. Now, that is, of  
22 course, in conjunction with this big decline in the  
23 Food Stamp rolls. Unprepared for this increasing  
24 demand for emergency food, New York City food kitchens  
25 and food pantries have had to turn away upwards of



1       74,000 individuals each month.

2               The significant drop in the Food Stamp rolls  
3       can be attributed to HRA's policies. HRA routinely  
4       denies applicants access to the Welfare and Food Stamp  
5       Program through use of diversion, problematic  
6       barriers, discrimination, degradation and arbitrary  
7       and inappropriate case closings. Many of these  
8       findings have been documented by the USDA and by the  
9       Office of Civil Rights Abuse and the Department of  
10      Health and Human Services.

11             Evidence detailed in our report and the  
12      experiences of advocates and low-income New Yorkers,  
13      some of which we will hear today, suggests that these  
14      practices continue to prevail and that communities of  
15      color are disproportionately impacted by these  
16      policies. In fact, in current population survey data,  
17      we found that while the receipt of food stamps  
18      declined among black and Latino households in New York  
19      City between 1995 and 1997, food stamp receipt  
20      increased among white households. We don't know why  
21      that is, but it seems to be something of a concern  
22      that we think should be looked into.

23             While New York City actively violates the  
24      rights for food, it's not the only party responsible  
25      for ending hunger and insuring access to food. New





1        York State has failed to adequately monitor New York  
2        City's actions and New York State has also failed to  
3        utilize and has even redirected portions of federal  
4        welfare funds that could and under Human Rights law  
5        must be used to help lift individuals and families out  
6        of hunger and poverty.

7                Our report argues that the federal  
8        government -- hate to say it -- has failed to  
9        adequately fund and administer the Food Stamp Program.  
10       I am glad you all are here today, but this is also  
11       important that you know. The Food Stamp benefit  
12       levels are far too meager and participation rates are  
13       dismally low and the federal government excludes  
14       classes of people from the program, as has already  
15       been pointed out.

16               Welfare and Food Stamp advocates in New York  
17       City agree that immediate and ongoing action must be  
18       taken to solve the crisis of hunger in New York City.  
19       Just as George Wallace stood in the school house door  
20       trying to prevent federally mandated integration,  
21       Mayor Guiliani and the city's welfare commissioner  
22       stand in the door of welfare and Food Stamp offices  
23       preventing poor New Yorkers from gaining access to  
24       food and other resources.

25               Now, as over thirty years ago, local



1 officials are attempting to ignore federal law. It  
2 appears as if history repeats itself. And again, only  
3 federal intervention and moral outrage will force the  
4 mayor and welfare commissioner to do what's right.

5 This is wrapping it up. New York City  
6 Welfare Administration is clearly out of sync with  
7 human rights principles. New York City has shown that  
8 it would like to treat food stamps like welfare and  
9 purge both rolls equally. The HRA Commissioner Jason  
10 Turner has stated "I count Food Stamps as being part  
11 of welfare. You are better off without either one."

12 The Food Stamp Program is one of the few  
13 remaining Safety Net programs available. The federal,  
14 state and local governments have an obligation to  
15 eliminate hunger and a well funded and administered  
16 Food Stamp Program would do just that.

17 The USDA has an opportunity to keep a rogue  
18 city administration like New York in compliance with  
19 federal and international law by continuing to monitor  
20 the Food Stamp policy procedure and implementation on  
21 an ongoing basis.

22 In addition, we urge the USDA to withdraw  
23 the proposed changes that weaken the rules which  
24 protect access to food stamps. Without vigilant  
25 monitoring on the part of the federal government, and



1 strong regulations that project access to food stamps,  
2 New York City will continue to unnecessarily push more  
3 people into hunger and poverty.

4 Thank you for coming.

5 UNDER SECRETARY WATKINS: Edie Mesich.

6 EDIE MESICH: Thank you. In preparation for  
7 this conversation today -- I'm with the Nutrition  
8 Consortium of New York State, the statewide  
9 anti-hunger organization -- we met with some statewide  
10 advocates and New York City advocates to take  
11 seriously the question, what's good about the Food  
12 Stamp Program and to present to you today the 10 top  
13 best things about the Food Stamp Program.

14 Number ten, the Food Stamp Program responds  
15 to economic change. It is counter-cyclical. That's  
16 an important truth and an important fact about the  
17 Food Stamp Program, something we need to keep in mind.

18 Number nine, participants can obtain the  
19 food of their choice. This assures improved nutrition  
20 across diverse cultures. That's an important, good  
21 fact about the Food Stamp Program.

22 Number eight, it is efficient, as Jan had  
23 pointed out. It uses the existing grocery system  
24 infrastructure.

25 Number seven, it helps many segments of the



1 community, both agriculture, food retailers,  
2 employees. It does create jobs. Participants, the  
3 health care sector, taxpayers, education, all are  
4 assisted through the Food Stamp Program.

5 Number six, the fact has been presented here  
6 today that it is a right, a justiciable right.

7 Number five, creates self-sufficiency by  
8 reducing hunger.

9 Number four, the fact that the Food Stamp  
10 Program is good for families. It enables people to  
11 eat together, eat their meals together in their homes.

12 Number three, the fact that it improves  
13 nutrition and health.

14 Number two, that it reduces hunger. The  
15 Food Stamp Program reduces hunger.

16 And finally the number one top best thing  
17 about the Food Stamp Program, the fact that it does  
18 represent a national commitment to end hunger and food  
19 insecurity.

20 Now, having acknowledged those 10 top best  
21 things about the Food Stamp Program, the Nutrition  
22 Consortium has a statewide food stamp work group that  
23 meets monthly and we have a very broad-based coalition  
24 meeting. We have advocate organizations present at  
25 the meeting. We have Food Stamp Program participants





1 present. We have state administrators. We have the  
2 local departments Upstate, the local departments of  
3 Social Services present and USDA sends representatives  
4 as well.

5 We decided that we would look and see what  
6 would we could agree on, that that broad based of a  
7 group, what things we would want to recommend to you  
8 today, and here they are: We all agreed that the Food  
9 Stamp Program must retain it's entitlement status.  
10 That is essential in fighting hunger in the United  
11 States.

12 We all agreed also that USDA is the  
13 appropriate administrator of the Food Stamp Program.  
14 We want, as you said, Under Secretary Watkins, the  
15 emphasis on the nutrition and the public service  
16 aspect of the Food Stamp Program, that it helps people  
17 and helps our society as a whole.

18 We all agree that there should be  
19 restoration for legal immigrants. That is essential.  
20 And with our diverse society, we not only note that  
21 that's essential because of the scandal of having  
22 hunger in the United States, but also that there are  
23 huge administrative burdens that are caused by this  
24 kind of categorical ineligibility.

25 We also all agree that we want to see



1 unemployed adults have access to the Food Stamp  
2 Program. We think that three month to three year rule  
3 should be entirely eliminated.

4 We also all agree that we want the work  
5 rules removed from the Food Stamp Program. Referring  
6 people who are participating to the experts in the  
7 labor services arena is fine, but not building in  
8 administrative requirements and sanctions. And again,  
9 that's because the public good is served by hungry  
10 people accessing food which is done through the Food  
11 Stamp Program.

12 We recommended and we agreed that we would  
13 recommend to you that Food Stamp benefits be expanded  
14 to cover special diets. And that's an important  
15 expansion that could be used.

16 We think, particularly as we're located in  
17 upstate New York that there should be one car per  
18 household simply excluded from the resource test. If  
19 you live in a rural area that has no public  
20 transportation and not have a car that is going to be  
21 good enough to get you around and therefore worth too  
22 much money under the current.

23 We think that persons who are participating  
24 in strikes who are in job actions who are thus hungry  
25 should be able to participate in the Food Stamp



1       Program.

2               We recommend to you as a group that the  
3       minimum benefit level be increased, that it be raised  
4       to a level that makes it worth everyone's while; the  
5       participant, in terms of accessing the program and the  
6       administrators, in terms of providing the benefit.  
7       That \$10 minimum is too low.

8               We recommend that you remove the gross test  
9       and just use the net for determining eligibility. We  
10       recommend that the general food stamp benefit levels  
11       be raised. At least go back to the low cost food plan  
12       and with the goal and the intention of looking at the  
13       market basket value in setting the benefit levels.

14              Further, we suggest we all agree that  
15       tiering the resources to household size would make a  
16       lot of sense. The need in a larger household or  
17       household with one adult for having \$2,000 in the bank  
18       for emergencies is obviously compounded when the  
19       household is larger. The need for retirement  
20       similarly. So we want to see the resources tiered to  
21       household size.

22              We also recommend that the food stamp  
23       benefit be certified for a twelve-month period. That  
24       the presence of hunger and the low income is enough to  
25       justify the appropriateness of providing a Food Stamp



1       Program benefit for a year. And we further recommend  
2       that you establish transitional programs for those who  
3       are leaving town; transitional eligibility similar to  
4       what is done in Medicaid or child care.

5               And finally, we recommend to you today that  
6       while we retain that federal standard for eligibility  
7       determination for the Food Stamp Program, benefit  
8       levels should be regionalized to reflect the regional  
9       costs of housing, shelter, growing season, heating  
10      costs, utilities. That's our recommendation to you  
11      today and thank you so much for having this  
12      opportunity to share our ideas.

13              UNDER SECRETARY WATKINS: Thank you very  
14      much.

15              Millie Arnold.

16              MILLIE ARNOLD: Hello, my name is Millie  
17      Sanchez Arnold. I'm the deputy director of End Hunger  
18      Connecticut, a statewide anti-hunger advocacy  
19      organization representing over 750 member agencies,  
20      three major food banks in Connecticut, social service  
21      agencies and individuals.

22              I spoke with a client at the beginning of  
23      this week. She's an elderly widow who lives alone.  
24      When she first contacted me, she had \$8 to last her  
25      the six days until she received her Social Security





1       check. She had no food in the house and prescriptions  
2       that needed to be filled immediately. Since that  
3       first phone call, she is again receiving food stamps  
4       which she had been denied in error and she is  
5       receiving \$10 per month in benefits. She's thankful  
6       to have the extra support, small as it is, to help  
7       keep food on her table.

8               I think we're all here because we know the  
9       value of the Food Stamp Program in assisting families  
10      and individuals to afford a nutritional diet. And we  
11      also all know too many people such as my friend the  
12      elderly widow who must face desperate situations on a  
13      regular basis. We know that a healthy nutritionally  
14      sound population is an investment in the future of our  
15      nation, our cities and our neighborhoods. The Food  
16      Stamp Program provides the basis of that investment.  
17      Yet, you also know the barriers that make accessing  
18      food stamps difficult, if not impossible, for many  
19      families and individuals. These barriers have  
20      multiplied since the enactment of the Personal  
21      Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation  
22      Act. However, the 2002 re-authorization of the Food  
23      Stamp Program offers the opportunity to strengthen the  
24      program and open it to all those in need, including  
25      legal immigrants, single adults and families leaving



1 welfare for work.

2 The first step to strengthening the Food  
3 Stamp Program is:

4 \* The commitment and investment of adequate  
5 funding on the part of the federal government so as to  
6 allow the expansion of nutritional benefits by  
7 continuing the Food Stamp Program as an entitlement  
8 program.

9 \* Restoring food stamps to eligible legal  
10 immigrants.

11 \* Restoring food stamps to single childless  
12 adults between the ages of 18 to 50 years.

13 \* Allowing families to own one car and still  
14 be eligible for food stamps.

15 \* Eliminating the cash from the shelter  
16 deduction, which is especially relevant in Connecticut  
17 with the second highest rental rates in the nation and  
18 areas like Fairfield County which are No. 1 in the  
19 area for rental.

20 \* Revise the Thrifty Food Plan to reflect a  
21 moderately based food budget.

22 \* Increase the earned income disregard to  
23 promote work and self-sufficiency and avoid the 21  
24 month "oppression" faced by Connecticut's  
25 welfare-to-work families.



1                   \* And increase the \$10 minimum to a more  
2 realistic amount.

3                   \* States and localities need regulatory and  
4 monetary support in order to enhance their ability to  
5 perform the job program administration with  
6 professionalism and empathy.

7                   \* The punitive aspects of quality control  
8 must be addressed to allow states more flexibility in  
9 meeting the needs of clients. This, again, is evident  
10 in Connecticut where the error rate and it's  
11 correction by necessity are the top priority to the  
12 detriment of the issue of a climbing participation  
13 rate.

14                   Steps that would further the improvement of  
15 the program include:

16                   \* Funding outreach efforts, regularly  
17 scheduled sensitivity training and regulation update  
18 training for all workers.

19                   \* Scheduling evening and weekend hours to  
20 accommodate working people.

21                   \* Out-station eligibility working using  
22 mobile units to facilitate access for both urban and  
23 rural clients.

24                   \* Maintaining bilingual capability relevant  
25 to the cultures being served.



1                   \* Developing simpler and shorter application  
2 forms.

3                   \* Scheduling reporting of income at  
4 reasonable intervals and requiring reporting for  
5 changes over \$100 rather than the present \$25 level.

6                   \* Implementing on-line application and  
7 allowing recording processes by mail, phone, fax and  
8 e-mail.

9                   In closing, Connecticut is stereotypically  
10 pictured as a place of rolling green hills and  
11 beautiful red barns. And, in part, this is true.  
12 But another truth is that 102,000 children are hungry  
13 or at risk of hunger and that 310,000 persons live  
14 below the poverty level in our state. To these needy  
15 citizens food stamps provide means to purchase  
16 nutrition, significantly impacting on the quality of  
17 their lives.

18                  Income in Connecticut looks to the expansion  
19 of the Food Stamp Program and the re-authorization of  
20 2002 to the benefit of all who live in our state and  
21 in our country.

22                  I thank you very much for the opportunity to  
23 relay you my concerns and my thoughts.

24                  UNDER SECRETARY WATKINS: Thank you.

25                  Terry Craig.





1                   TERRY CRAIG: Hi, I'm with Millie. I'm the  
2                   Executive Director of End Hunger Connecticut and thank  
3                   you for having me here today. I sat down a couple of  
4                   days ago to draft some comments that I thought were  
5                   pertinent to why we are all here today and I went a  
6                   little overboard.

7                   I am going to try to abbreviate some of the  
8                   comments that I have written here. I wanted to start  
9                   out by telling you a little about Connecticut and so  
10                  some dry statistics and things like that, but they are  
11                  very relevant, they are important for people to be  
12                  aware of.

13                  Since 1996 the number of Connecticut  
14                  residents receiving food stamps has declined by almost  
15                  19 percent. And while it's not unusual for The Food  
16                  Stamp Program to fluctuate with the economy in  
17                  response to economic changes, the declining  
18                  participation rates is not attributable to "poverty  
19                  rates" or "low unemployment rates" because it so far  
20                  outstripped those figures.

21                  For example, during that same period of  
22                  time, the poverty rate decline in Connecticut is only  
23                  from 2.2 percent versus the 19 percent. Although  
24                  undoubtedly case loads have declined in part because  
25                  participants have no cash assistance for work, most of



1       these individual families only entered the ranks of  
2       the working poor. So I wanted to talk to you about  
3       the average wage of the individuals and families  
4       leaving cash assistance in the state of Connecticut as  
5       reported by the Department of Social Services in June.  
6       And that was \$6.93 per hour. And that figure is not  
7       at all surprising given that the national priorities  
8       project estimates that approximately one-third of  
9       Connecticut's jobs pay wages below the official  
10      poverty level. However, when we talk about the  
11      official poverty level, we must not forget that that's  
12      really not based in any sense of reality, so I want to  
13      talk to you about a study conducted by the state of  
14      Connecticut, commissioned by the state of Connecticut  
15      which was recently released called the  
16      "Self-sufficiency Study."

17               According to this study, a family of three  
18      composed of one adult, one pre-schooler and one  
19      school-age child must make between \$15.57 an hour and  
20      \$20.93 an hour, depending upon the region in which you  
21      live in the state to meet that family's basic human  
22      needs. Nothing extraordinary. Nothing extravagant.  
23      Just to keep a roof over your head and adequate  
24      transportation and food on your table. So when  
25      confronted with this economic reality, the Food Stamp



1       Program is essential to the home. It's supplementing  
2       low-income families' ability to afford an adequately  
3       nutritious diet.

4               As we know the devastating effects of hunger  
5       and malnutrition, individually and on our society as a  
6       whole, it's in our collective long-term interest to  
7       insure that families have the resources necessary to  
8       purchase a significant quantity of nutritionally  
9       adequate food.

10              I'm going to talk to you about two primary  
11       concerns that I have. The first is decrease in  
12       participation rates that we have seen on a national  
13       basis. Several studies have been done to investigate  
14       what the cause is of that decrease in participation,  
15       what the causes are for the decrease. And one of them  
16       is misinformation and the other is restrictive  
17       application and verification procedures that are being  
18       implemented by states.

19              I will start with misinformation first.  
20       Many eligible families just simply do not understand  
21       that they still qualify for benefits, even though they  
22       are no longer receiving cash assistance. In  
23       Connecticut, the aggressive approach to move families  
24       off cash assistance within 21 months is likely to have  
25       also discouraged eligible residents from continuing to



1       receive food stamps. In this regard, Connecticut  
2       shortens the Food Stamp certification period to  
3       coincide with the termination of cash assistance  
4       regardless of the reason for termination. Many states  
5       do this. The inevitable appearance created by  
6       lengthening the termination of cash benefits to food  
7       stamp recertification is that the same termination  
8       rules apply to both programs. Inadequate knowledge of  
9       distinctions in cash assistance programs and Food  
10      Stamp Program requirements is resulting in very  
11      confusing messages being received by those in need and  
12      that's unacceptable. And so accordingly we recommend  
13      that in short time immediate outreach be performed to  
14      reach those who have wrongfully lost from the program  
15      and in the long term that there will be an absolute  
16      prohibition against shortened certification periods to  
17      coincide with cash assistance termination be  
18      implemented with re-authorization. That's essential.

19               My second point is that plunging  
20      participation rates are linked to the adoption of  
21      measures designed to improve payment accuracy in the  
22      food stamp eligibility and benefit determination  
23      process. We know that this has a corollary effect of  
24      restricting access and so we're extremely concerned  
25      over the inevitable conflict that arises between





1       quality control concerns and program participation  
2       rate concerns. The struggle of dominance between  
3       these two principles has led to an odd sort of induced  
4       schizophrenia in state administration of the Food  
5       Stamp Program.

6               On the one hand, states are being pressured  
7       by the USDA to address issues of restricted access  
8       that have led to the precipitous drop in Food Stamp  
9       rolls, while on the other hand, the pressured to avoid  
10      quality control errors that often result from  
11      households' unstable financial circumstances. So in  
12      light of significant sanctions imposed on states such  
13      as Connecticut, it is unreasonable to believe that  
14      program access anxieties will ever prevail over those  
15      of payment accuracy. And so, in light of such a  
16      climate, states have consistently responded by  
17      implementing evermore rigid and harsh demands on  
18      families and trying when they are least in a position  
19      to meet those demands and do conflicting family and  
20      work obligations. So based on the above, heightened  
21      access to the program must be our top priority, not  
22      payment accuracy.

23              Many states including Connecticut shorten  
24      certification period for households that earn income  
25      simply because their financial circumstance are more



1       likely to vary. These families are working and have  
2       the shortest certification periods and the burden  
3       imposed upon them is far more enormous than any other  
4       subset of participants. So it seems incongruent with  
5       wanting to maintain or heighten participation rates.  
6       So we're making the following recommendations, and  
7       these are by no means inclusive of every  
8       recommendation we would make, but there are some that  
9       came to me immediately:

10               \* Lengthened, not shortened certification  
11       periods for working families and an elimination of the  
12       policy targeting working families for the shortest  
13       certification periods.

14               \* A six-month "hold-harmless" period where  
15       payment errors are not assessed against states from  
16       the time a family's cash assistance ends.

17               \* A six-month continuation of benefits at  
18       the same level from the date a family leaves cash  
19       assistance, coupled with an automatic six-month  
20       certification period extension.

21               \* Raising the \$25 threshold for reporting  
22       changes to \$100, but not doing this by waiver.

23               \* Eliminating the monthly reporting option  
24       and implementing an ad hoc reporting requirement as  
25       changes occur.



1                   \* A complete overhaul of the FNS payment  
2 accuracy measure, whereby states are not measured by  
3 the average state in determining program  
4 administration successes or failures because as we  
5 know, in this system, half of the states will always  
6 be deemed to have failed. It's just built into the  
7 definition of how we look at it.

8                   \* Modify the \$25 error tolerance level to  
9 accord on a sliding scale with household size and  
10 benefit levels.

11                  \* Vary the resource limit to accord with  
12 household size.

13                  \* Implementation of an  
14 incentive/disincentive quality control measure to hold  
15 states accountable for the lack of timeliness in  
16 application processing.

17                  It absolutely baffles me that the only  
18 payment you are looking at quality control is payment  
19 errors and not considering client satisfaction and  
20 whether people are getting benefits in a timely  
21 manner. We have no system to penalize states who are  
22 not processing applications, so thank God for Legal  
23 Services.

24                  \* Eliminating cash incentives for states  
25 with low error rates and provide incentive for



1       increased participation rates in client satisfaction  
2       to remove to impetus for strict state administration  
3       hindering access.

4               \* Mandated simplification of the Food Stamp  
5       application, verification and certification procedures  
6       through adoption of "user-friendly" applications,  
7       technical assistance and staff in completing  
8       applications, extended office hours and other  
9       accommodations for working families.

10              \* Developing a web-based screening pool for  
11       low-income people and their representatives to use in  
12       determining eligibility.

13              UNDER SECRETARY WATKINS: Terry, can you  
14       wrap it up for us.

15              TERRY CRAIG: Okay, let me just quickly  
16       cover a couple of other things.

17              I would recommend that USDA treat vehicles  
18       as it does any other resource that they are unable to  
19       sell for a significant amount of money to purchase  
20       food. I know that is a current recommendation and I  
21       applaud you for that, but we just want to take the  
22       opportunity to stress that working families should not  
23       be excluded from the Food Stamp Program at a time when  
24       they need to work, they need reliable transportation  
25       and often times don't own these cars outright, and





1       moreover, we urge that the vehicle allowance be  
2       expanded to exempt one vehicle, which you previously  
3       heard.

4               With respect to benefit inadequacy, I just  
5       have a couple of recommendations. We recently  
6       conducted a survey of emergency food providers and one  
7       of the questions we asked was an open-ended question.  
8       We asked these providers who deal with people in soup  
9       kitchens and food pantries on a daily basis from their  
10      observations what did they think was the principal  
11      reason or reasons that people utilize their services.  
12      And overwhelmingly people responded in one of two  
13      ways, but the one relevant here is that people are  
14      running out of food stamps before the end of the  
15      month. So they are just not sufficient and we know  
16      that. So we are starting from that premise, that  
17      people cannot adequately feed themselves in a  
18      nutritious manner with the allotted amount of food  
19      stamps. We would recommend the following:

20              UNDER SECRETARY WATKINS: Can you do one and  
21      then provide the rest of your written comments to us.

22              TERRY CRAIG: Sure.

23              \* Increasing the shelter cap to reflect  
24      reasonable housing cost.

25              \* Elimination of the Thrifty Food Plan as



1 the benchmark of which benefit levels are calculated  
2 to be replaced with a more reasonable plan that  
3 conforms with the USDA's new nutrition guidelines.

4 \* Increasing the minimum \$10 benefit level,  
5 which will not only increase the amount of assistance  
6 but will serve as an inducement to attract those who  
7 typically do not participate (i.e., seniors) due to  
8 inadequate benefits.

9 And I thank you for the opportunity to speak  
10 with you today and I think that we have to consider  
11 these methods for improving the program in light of  
12 the real nutritional crisis that we're facing in our  
13 country.

14 Thank you.

15 UNDER SECRETARY WATKINS: Thank you very  
16 much.

17 I just say to all of you there are a lot of  
18 people who want to be heard today, so if you can keep  
19 your comments succinct and brief and try to do it in  
20 two to five minutes, it will help us get the comments  
21 in from the many people who have come today.

22 The next person is Christine Meehan.

23 CHRISTINE MEEHAN: My name is Chris Meehan.  
24 I am a director of community services for the Vermont  
25 Food Bank.



1                   Just to tell you a bit about us, we're the  
2                   only food bank in Vermont and we distribute to  
3                   approximately 250 partner organizations state wide.  
4                   And last year we distributed 2.5 million pounds of  
5                   food.

6                   I am here today to talk briefly about a  
7                   paradox that's been happening in the state of Vermont.  
8                   Over the past several years participation in the Food  
9                   Stamp Program has dropped 22 percent since 1996 and at  
10                  the same time there has been more than a 100 percent  
11                  increase in the numbers of people, particularly  
12                  working families with children who are seeking  
13                  assistance at food shelters and community meal sites.  
14                  Twenty percent of Vermont's population is accessing  
15                  emergency food.

16                  This is an alarming trend, as it assumes  
17                  that these agencies can pick up the slack and reduce  
18                  participation in government nutrition programs when in  
19                  reality the charitable food system could never begin  
20                  to replace these food programs.

21                  There is a serious problem when a family  
22                  would rather go to a food shelter to receive a bag of  
23                  food as opposed to going to the supermarket to shop  
24                  for themselves. Why are there so many people, not  
25                  just in Vermont, but nationwide that don't want to



1        participate in this program? This is a strong  
2        indicator that the Food Stamp Program needs to change.

3                The state of Vermont recently funded a  
4        two-year project that hopes to educate volunteers at  
5        food shelters and community meal sites about the  
6        government nutrition programs that are available to  
7        their clients. This is a start. Yet there are so  
8        many federal rules and regulations that you have heard  
9        about today that need to be looked at in order to make  
10       this program the success that it should be. Just to  
11       name a few, because there have been so many mentioned  
12       today:

13               \* To make the program more attractive to  
14       everyone we are recommending that the USDA change the  
15       focus of the Food Stamp Program to a nutrition  
16       security program similar to Social Security.

17               \* And to make the application processes  
18       easier, we recommend providing expedited food stamps  
19       for people and families enrolled in school meals, WIC,  
20       senior meals or Medicaid.

21               The Food Stamp program helps low income  
22       families and individuals to maintain adequate  
23       nutrition in the most dignified way possible. It also  
24       brings millions of federal dollars into our states and  
25       monies pumped back into the economy from local





1       supermarkets.

2               We cannot sit back and allow this program to  
3       disintegrate as it is. Please consider the reasonable  
4       recommendations that are being made today by all of  
5       these advocates.

6               Thank you.

7               UNDER SECRETARY WATKINS: Thank you.

8               Don Friedman.

9               DON FRIEDMAN: I'm Don Friedman with the  
10       Community Food Resource Center in New York City. We  
11       heard from a couple of our folks today. One the  
12       things that we do that we are proud of is combine  
13       direct service in the form of soup kitchen, nutrition  
14       outreach, anti-eviction work with policy advocacy on  
15       hunger and poverty issues. We have many areas of that  
16       you will be hearing today and I'm going to focus on  
17       just one and you have already heard to some extent  
18       about this issue and I will try to be brief and that  
19       is concerns with USDA proposed regulations,  
20       particularly those of February 29th. What I will  
21       address is those particularly as they relate to the  
22       basic access to food stamps.

23               My comments flow out of three critical  
24       premises. One, as you know there has been a huge  
25       decline in the receipt of food stamps, much of it



1       involving people who are, in fact, eligible for food  
2       stamps.

3               Two, that New York City's current  
4       administration, the Human Resources Administration  
5       operates by design a policy that is designed to  
6       discourage and divert people from pursuing benefits  
7       for which they are eligible.

8               And three, our fundamental belief that the  
9       USDA is concerned about the decline in accessing of  
10      benefits and is specifically concerned about New York  
11      City policy on the treatment of people who are  
12      pursuing benefits.

13              Given those underlying premises, it was  
14      surprising and troubling to us and, to be honest,  
15      confusing to us the nature of some of the USDA's  
16      proposed regulations to the February 29th. We did a  
17      lot of speculation of what that was about. We thought  
18      maybe it was just a brief lapse and now we revisit  
19      them in finalizing the regulations, in fact, we'll get  
20      rid of some of the more offending elements.

21              Some of the aspects of the proposal I will  
22      just try to list briefly are things that really seem  
23      to subvert and contradict what we really believe and  
24      your presence here shows your intent to really hear  
25      about people and get people who are eligible and in



1       need of benefits to actually access them. I know that  
2       you received many comments about these proposed  
3       regulations and that's why I will just try to be brief  
4       and not redundant and I will just outline a few  
5       critical areas.

6               One critical area is a first step in program  
7       access in information. The current regulations  
8       include among other things that the plain prominent  
9       language on the application there has to be  
10      information right up front about the right to apply,  
11      about the availability of expedited food stamps and  
12      about the fact that advising people that food stamps  
13      are only available from the date of application so  
14      there is reason to try to make sure that application  
15      is filed up front.

16             Next there is a requirement currently in the  
17      rules about signs and food stamp offices have to  
18      explain the process and about the right to file on the  
19      first day.

20             Next there is an obligation to advise  
21      clients first specifically about the right to apply  
22      without delay, the fact that they don't necessarily  
23      have to be interviewed right at the start and the  
24      right to file and application, even if it's not  
25      complete yet.



1           Each of these requirements helps people to  
2           insure that they understand their rights and that the  
3           are not discouraged from applying.

4           The proposed regulations would delete every  
5           one of the provisions that I just outlined.

6           Next is the area of documentation and  
7           cooperation; both application and recertification.  
8           This is an easy area, as we have learned unfortunately  
9           from HRA over and over, this is an easy area where you  
10          keep raising the bar. All you have to do is give  
11          people a few more documents to show up with. Give  
12          them a few more appointments and you easily cut the  
13          rolls, cut the applications, increase the rejections.

14          Among the rules currently in existence under  
15          Food Stamp law, under the regulations there are rules  
16          protecting households against denials. And to  
17          summarize a few different areas protecting against  
18          denials, essentially when the household is acting in  
19          good faith, when their inability to get a document or  
20          some form of documentation has nothing to do with  
21          their efforts, it's for reasons either involving a  
22          third party or some other reason beyond their control.  
23          Currently there are protections against denials in  
24          those situations. The proposed regulations would  
25          severely weaken some of those protections.





1           In addition, they are currently -- I call it  
2           the area of duty to assist. There are currently some  
3           very good provisions about food stamp workers --  
4           eligibility workers' obligations to assist people who  
5           are you unable to get verification and documentation.  
6           The proposals would not eliminate but would seriously  
7           dilute the protections that that obligation to assist  
8           and we would, of course, favor that any time a person  
9           is having difficulty get ting documentation if they  
10          are acting in good faith and the reasons for their  
11          non-verification are beyond their control, that should  
12          trigger a duty to assist.

13                 Right now the law provides a number of  
14                 different context application recertification, what I  
15                 would call a grace period where if in the designated  
16                 time period is a person can't produce their  
17                 documentation, they are given another period. They  
18                 are given maybe 30 extra days. If a particular  
19                 document is asked for, they have to get 10 days.  
20                 There are a number of proposals that would eliminate  
21                 or weaken those obligations to write some sort of --  
22                 again, what I call a grace period.

23                 There has already been reference to the  
24                 proposed right to enhance local right to shorten  
25                 recertification periods. There are other ways that



1       the system can verify if people are still eligible.  
2       They can retroactively adjust. I guess I would say  
3       that if there are going to be any errors here,  
4       shouldn't it be in favor of somebody getting a few  
5       dollars foods stamps more than they are maybe legally  
6       entitled to rather than be short. And I would add to  
7       that, you can't retroactively eat.

8               Just lastly I would mention a couple of  
9       additional areas here. There is a rule now that when  
10      the only thing holding up a food stamp acceptance is  
11      verification of eligibility for an accompanying TANF  
12      application, that, in fact, that shouldn't be allowed  
13      to hold up, go beyond the 30 days of the rejection.  
14      That's proposed to be eliminated. We wish that  
15      wouldn't happen.

16             Next there is some proposals that we feel  
17      would dilute the current confidentiality and privacy  
18      protections in the interview process. And we would  
19      hope that would be done.

20             Next there is a requirement not that  
21      verification of changes income not have to be done  
22      when the change is less than \$25. As was proposed by  
23      other witnesses, I would propose that amount be  
24      raised, rather than the current proposal which is that  
25      it be eliminated so that every change must be



1       verified.

2               Closing up, it may look like many of these  
3       proposals in the proposed regulations standing alone  
4       one by one to implement those wouldn't have disastrous  
5       consequences with regard to accessing benefits. I  
6       would suggest three reasons why it's pretty important.

7               Number one, it could have a significant  
8       effect, cumulatively the impact of these proposed  
9       regulations could be quite dramatic.

10              Number two, aside from the specific content  
11       of these regulations, these proposals, I think what  
12       maybe most importantly what these proposals would do  
13       is send a message to places like New York City that  
14       are already pretty difficult and problematic about  
15       letting people have access to benefits. It would tell  
16       them that the climate maybe has changed, the USDA is  
17       now saying that their policies of diversion and  
18       discouragement are not (sic) going to be looked over  
19       with such disfavor and we believe that you actually do  
20       feel the disfavor, a bad feeling about how they  
21       discourage people. These proposed regulations might  
22       send a very different message.

23              Lastly, I will say that I actually come from  
24       a welfare advocate background and quite honestly one  
25       of the very significant things about food stamps, the



1       current regulations relates to the fact that in my  
2       opinion the federal government has abdicated its  
3       responsibility to provide the provision of cash  
4       assistance. They have abdicated their responsibility  
5       to in any way oversee and make sure there is just  
6       administration of the Welfare Program.

7               One of the only handles that we have in both  
8       the food stamps area, the Medicaid area and the  
9       welfare area to try to ensure that there is some  
10      justice and some federal oversight and maybe if  
11      necessary some access to the federal court. One of  
12      the important tools that does that is the food stamps  
13      law and the food stamps regulation. So their impact  
14      spreads. It's, of course, primarily the Food Stamp  
15      Program, but they also have an important impact on  
16      poor peoples' access to benefits in general.

17             So, in closing, I would just hope that you  
18      would take a serious revisiting of these regulations.  
19      I think that is already hopefully in the works and, if  
20      anything, strengthen client access rather than  
21      diluting it.

22             Thanks.

23             UNDER SECRETARY WATKINS: Thank you.

24             Rob Meehan.

25             ROB MEEHAN: My name is Rob Meehan and I





1 work with the Vermont Campaign to End Childhood Hunger  
2 recently hired to organize a Food Stamp outreach  
3 program in northern and central Vermont that is being  
4 funded by the state and being funded by the USDA.

5 As my colleague from the Vermont Food Bank  
6 mentioned, many Vermonters are eligible for food  
7 stamps and yet participation has declined leaving  
8 thousands of Vermonters, many of them children, hungry  
9 or at risk of hunger.

10 It is clear that the increase in hunger and  
11 food shelter patronage indicate that people are not  
12 discarding food stamps because they are economically  
13 better off.

14 I am here to talk about some of the obvious  
15 reasons Vermonters are not participating the Food  
16 Stamp Program. People living with low incomes in  
17 Vermont face several challenges. In the northeast  
18 taken for example, many people have very high rent  
19 costs which cause them to choose between paying bills  
20 and providing food. In the rural areas of Vermont it  
21 is also difficult for people with unreliable vehicles  
22 to get to a supermarket or to a social welfare office.  
23 For those low income Vermonters with reliable  
24 vehicles, some have problems getting to the social  
25 welfare office during business hours because they have



1        day jobs. Therefore many families have found it  
2        difficult to access their benefits.

3                The average individual monthly benefits are  
4        meager, \$56.34 per person in Vermont, the total loss  
5        of benefits has substantial impact on our state's  
6        economy. In your 1998 49,000 Vermonters received food  
7        stamp benefits. Totally an estimated \$39.7 million  
8        dollars in 1999, serving 6,000 fewer people in which  
9        2600 were children, the estimated income was reduced  
10       to \$34.8 million. This difference of \$4.9 million in  
11       one year could help to feed Vermont's neediest  
12       families, henceforth all the grocery stores.

13               Families moving from welfare to work,  
14       entering low paying jobs continue to need assistance.  
15       The Food Stamp Program supplements the food resources  
16       of low wage earners. Food stamps enhance the status  
17       of children's well-being, encourages work, and aids in  
18       transition from cash assistance.

19               When poor families have food stamps for  
20       nutrition, it allows them to use more of their scarce  
21       resources for other necessities, shelter, child care,  
22       travel to work, school fees.

23               For the health and well-being of low income  
24       Vermonters, and to maximum the amount of tax dollars  
25       that come back to Vermont from the federal and state



1 government, we're trying to increase participation in  
2 the Food Stamp Program through outreach. That's not  
3 enough. Changes need to be made in the current  
4 program such as update eligibility levels that are  
5 based on poverty levels below the cost of living.  
6 Particularly for rural Vermonters the car value level  
7 is unrealistically low. In order for people to climb  
8 out of situations of low income, reliable, safe  
9 vehicles are a necessity in our state.

10 Changes need to be made in the application  
11 process to make it easier for Vermonters to apply.  
12 The Food Stamp Program reduces hunger, increases  
13 nutrition and health and it's good for families.  
14 Please support these recommendations before you today.

15 Thank you.

16 UNDER SECRETARY WATKINS: Thank you.

17 Vilma Tejeda.

18 VILMA TEJEDA: Good afternoon my name is  
19 Vilma Tejeda. I came to the United States in 1992 as  
20 a resident. I have always worked as a hairdresser for  
21 many years. After having my youngest daughter who is  
22 six years old, for health problems, health reasons and  
23 because I couldn't find an adequate day care  
24 situation, I had to go onto welfare.

25 At that time I was given welfare benefits,



1 but when one goes to these welfare offices, one is  
2 looked at as if one were sub-human. As I said before,  
3 I have always worked and I have studied.

4 After a while I had an accident. Some  
5 months before my accident, my benefits were cut off.  
6 I had a hearing and I won. And I received all of my  
7 previous benefits but I did not get food stamps. I  
8 felt a lot of pressure because I was told that I  
9 wasn't going to be able to receive food stamps because  
10 I was an immigrant and not a citizen. I was not a  
11 citizen, but my children are citizens and they needed  
12 food and they were being denied food. I have always  
13 worked before. I have studied and I feel that when I  
14 needed help I should have gotten it because I pay my  
15 takes.

16 Even though I had an accident and I need to  
17 be in a wheelchair, it was still demanded of me that I  
18 work and it's very obvious that I cannot. No one  
19 knows what it's like to go to these places and hear  
20 comments made between clenched teeth and no one knows  
21 what it feels like. I fell like I should be able to  
22 receive these benefits because I have worked and I am  
23 a citizen.

24 I do not want to be a public burden. This  
25 is not -- I'm not making excuses. I have worked. I





1       have studied and this is what I'm teaching my  
2       children. And my oldest son is in the Marines. I  
3       would hope that these conversations go out all over  
4       and that people here and say what needs to be said.  
5       I just want to put my grain of sand in.

6               There are a lot of people like me who are in  
7       this situation. I just hope that everyone who is in  
8       the situation that I am in, I hope that every one is  
9       able to access food stamps, to access this program.

10              What I want to say is this: If we want to  
11       have good citizens and we don't feed our children and  
12       our children are the future how are we going to have  
13       good citizens?

14              Thank you.

15              UNDER SECRETARY WATKINS: Sencion Suriel.

16              SENCION SURIEL: Good afternoon. My name is  
17       Sencion Suriel. I thank you listening.

18              At this moment I'm working. Before, in 1996  
19       or in 1997 approximately, I was on welfare. At that  
20       time that I was on welfare, I was getting a very, very  
21       small amount of money and my expenses, my rent was  
22       very high. I went to apply for additional assistance  
23       to pay my rent because I wasn't able to pay my rent.  
24       When I did receive the additional assistance for my  
25       rent, my food stamp allotment was cut for me and my



1 daughter to \$10 a month. I suppose when they gave me  
2 the additional the help to pay my rent, they figured  
3 that I would just be eating less. And I just asked  
4 myself, I wondered what was I supposed to do with \$10  
5 a month to feed myself and to feed my daughter. I  
6 talked to my counselor. I asked for help and I was  
7 told that well, because I was receiving additional  
8 money for rent, that was all that I was entitled to in  
9 terms of food stamps.

10 Because of this extra help I had to work.  
11 I was required to work. I worked for two years in day  
12 care and I thought that working in these places, I  
13 would eventually be taken on as an employee, but that  
14 didn't happen. I was working for free and I was never  
15 taken on as an employee because they already had me  
16 working there for free and when a job opportunity was  
17 available, someone else got the job. I was in great  
18 need and I would go to public soup kitchens, places  
19 where food was given out for free. They were very,  
20 very difficult times.

21 Luckily I did become lucky and I have gotten  
22 a job as a home health aid and I'm working now. So I  
23 have been working for about seven months now as a home  
24 health aid. And before, for two years previously,  
25 when I wasn't working I was getting \$10 a month in



1 food stamps. Now I'm getting \$101 a month in food  
2 stamps. But when I most needed help, it was denied to  
3 me.

4 Thank you. That's all.

5 UNDER SECRETARY WATKINS: Thank you.

6 We have a caller.

7 CALLER: (Inaudible) (Technical difficulty).

8 UNDER SECRETARY WATKINS: Thank you, caller.

9 Brian Wing.

10 BRIAN WING: Good afternoon. Again, I would  
11 like to welcome you to New York. My name is Brian  
12 Wing. I am the commissioner of the New York State  
13 Office of Temporary Disability Assistance. I am  
14 responsible for administering the program here in New  
15 York Stat.

16 First we would also like to express to you  
17 our appreciation for giving us the opportunity to  
18 express our concerns regarding the current Food Stamp  
19 Program and our recommendations for changes that we  
20 believe would better serve both our clients as wells  
21 as our program.

22 Our comments will reflect what we see in  
23 terms of dealing with clients and their local  
24 administrators on a day-by-day basis. First, we  
25 believe that the USDA and Congress need to re-examine



1       both the purpose and the procedures of the Food Stamp  
2       Program. The FMS mission statement speaks to food  
3       security and nutrition, yet many of the regulations  
4       and procedures focus on narrow definitions of  
5       eligibility and bureaucratic processes.

6               In general, we suggest the Food Stamp  
7       Program be rehashed, as others have suggested, as a  
8       nutritional assistance program, removing the welfare  
9       stigma.

10              We suggest adjusting some of the financial  
11       standards such as the minimum \$10 allotment. The  
12       resource limits, especially for seniors and the gross  
13       income test to reflect more appropriate levels and to  
14       encourage program participation, certainly among  
15       seniors and working families.

16              Even the name "Food Stamp Program" by itself  
17       is rapidly becoming obsolete with the implementation  
18       of electronic transfer where there are no receipts.

19              We suggest the program be made more working  
20       family friendly through amendments to better support  
21       working families and those engaged in work related  
22       activity. I won't go into these, but several of these  
23       have already been suggested.

24              We also believe up to six months  
25       transitional food stamps should be allowed while





1 households leaving TANF or Safety Net assistance due  
2 to employment.

3 We believe the program should parallel  
4 transitional medical assistance, child care by  
5 providing continued benefits based on the case  
6 circumstance at the time of closing and then with a  
7 recertification after six months.

8 We also believe you should consider  
9 exempting the federal, state earned income tax credit.  
10 Most low income wage earners receive EITC payments not  
11 as weekly advances, but as annual lump sums. And  
12 under current program rule, lump sum EITC payments are  
13 considered resources. We believe those should be  
14 changed.

15 We would also like to see states provide  
16 more flexibility in determining which households are  
17 required to have face-to-face recertification  
18 intervals. New and emerging technologies make it  
19 unnecessary to bring all categories of clients in for  
20 face-to-face recertifications.

21 Increased earned income exemption; the  
22 current 20 percent is much lower than for TANF, which  
23 in New York is 47 percent which does not reflect the  
24 cost related to going to work, tax withholding,  
25 transportation, meals and clothing, all are much



1 higher.

2 With regard to non-citizens and immigrants,  
3 New York, similar to a handful of states, has a large  
4 non-citizen population. While the recent changes can  
5 certainly somewhat ease the disparity between citizens  
6 and legal non-citizens, policies regarding many are  
7 still unfair and incredibly complex. Our workers  
8 currently struggle to implement these policies. And  
9 what I brought just to show you is our guessed aid for  
10 local workers which is six pages, front and back.  
11 This is their guessed aid that tries to help to  
12 determine the differences in eligibility. That in  
13 itself speaks volumes, I think, to the complexity of  
14 that program.

15 We recommend that the same rules apply to  
16 both citizens and legal non-citizens. At the very  
17 least, an equity between the populations cannot be  
18 achieved and the Food Stamp Program will continue to  
19 rely on the QC, quality control process. We would  
20 suggest that a credit be provided to states that have  
21 significant alien populations.

22 In items of state flexibility, I believe the  
23 TANF Program has proven that states can be trusted to  
24 exercise program flexibility in responsible and  
25 innovative ways. States would like to have similar



1 flexibility in the Food Stamp Program; adjust the  
2 program according to local circumstances and provide  
3 greater conformity with our other supportive programs  
4 such as TANF, Medicaid and other state initiatives.

5 We would recommend building in a flexibility  
6 component for individual state initiatives without the  
7 neutrality requirement which currently hinders  
8 innovation.

9 We believe states would like to have more  
10 flexibility in mere application and notice  
11 requirements for TANF. In our opinion, based upon the  
12 work we have to do with clients, we find that the  
13 differing requirements confuse clients and makes it  
14 very difficult for them to understand exactly what  
15 their rights and entitlements are.

16 We would also like to offer just a couple of  
17 comments regarding the transition to EBT, as alluded  
18 to earlier. Policies need to be reviewed and adjusted  
19 to reflect the changes already made both this terms of  
20 technological advances and changes in society as a  
21 whole. For example, the EBT will radically redefine  
22 the distinction between Food Stamp benefit issuance  
23 and redemption. Federal legislation and our  
24 regulations need to be amended to recognize the  
25 distinction between deductions in benefit levels which



1 do require client notices and EBT adjustments which  
2 are commercial transactions that do not require client  
3 notices.

4 Also with regard to eligible institutions,  
5 we would like to see states given the flexibility to  
6 move away from certifying individual residents for  
7 food stamp benefits and instead being able to provide  
8 a mechanism to provide the assistance directly to  
9 certified facilities.

10 With regard to EBT interoperabilities  
11 (phonetic), speaking both as a state commissioner as  
12 well as the national EBT chairman for the NACHA  
13 (phonetic) counsel, I urge you to work with the states  
14 and with NACHA to develop a simple and workable  
15 mechanism to implement the interoperability standard  
16 which you must do before the end of the year.

17 Finally, I would like to acknowledge the  
18 assistance and support that we received from the  
19 regional office and their staff. I think we worked  
20 hard over the last couple of years and we look forward  
21 to continuing that partnership.

22 Thank you.

23 UNDER SECRETARY WATKINS: Thank you.

24 Patricia Bailey.

25 PATRICIA BAILEY: Hello. My name is





1 Patricia Bailey. I went from welfare to work fare. I  
2 was terminated from the program as of last year, March  
3 of 1999. They told me that I needed to wait three  
4 months before I can recertify for the food stamps. I  
5 have been trying to get food stamps ever sense. I  
6 work but I don't make that much money. I have three  
7 children and two grands that live with me.

8 When I went to apply for the food stamps and  
9 they looked at my pay stubs, they asked me what was  
10 the 401K that was on my stubs. I told them that that  
11 was a retirement plan that the job had gave all the  
12 associates that worked there. After a year, they put  
13 you on the 401K which is a retirement plan. They told  
14 me that I had to use that money from that plan and I  
15 wasn't supposed to have no other income but the job  
16 income that I had and I couldn't have a 401K plan. I  
17 explained to them that that was money that I could not  
18 touch. It's not like I had an ATM machine and I could  
19 just go and get the money out of the bank whenever I  
20 was in need of it. They denied me the food stamps and  
21 Medicaid. She told me to get another job because  
22 obviously this job wasn't working out for me so I  
23 needed another job to make ends meet.

24 The whole point I'm trying to say is that me  
25 and my family are hungry. When I left this morning, I



1       had a pack of chicken, lettuce, tomatoes and two cans  
2       of pork and beans. Thank God that my kids do go to  
3       summer school to get the breakfast and free lunch.  
4       Other than that, my kids wouldn't have anything to  
5       eat.

6                   I couldn't understand why they denied me  
7       food stamps because I come to find out that I was  
8       entitled to food stamps, but they just don't want to  
9       give it to me and I'm not understanding why. I  
10      complied with them from getting welfare to work fare.  
11      It's not working. I'm not understanding what is going  
12      on. So that's why I'm here today, to know what is  
13      going on with single parents like me.

14                   Thank you.

15                   UNDER SECRETARY WATKINS: German Tejeda.

16                   GERMAN TEJEDA: My name is German Tejeda and  
17      I work for the Community Resource Center and I work in  
18      a project there preventing evictions and I have come  
19      to talk today about your shelter cap very briefly.  
20      Some of my colleagues have already covered several  
21      other areas.

22                   As you heard from one of the clients before,  
23      shelter is a big issue in New York City. Rents are  
24      not \$275. You heard from Ms. Colleen Pawling about a  
25      statewide survey that said the average rent is \$510.



1       This is duly mistaken. New York City, I can't find  
2       you a rent under \$600 in the South Bronx. I'm talking  
3       about South Bronx, one bedroom, \$600. That's the best  
4       that I can do for you right now. And when you don't  
5       take into account that reality, you have a situation  
6       like what happened to a lady here before. To give you  
7       a little education as to what New York's rent system  
8       is like, we have something called rent stabilization  
9       and we have something called poor tax. A poor tax in  
10      New York State means you cannot have a rent below \$500  
11      because if you have a rent below \$500, they are going  
12      to tax you to make sure that you no longer have rent  
13      of \$500. So when you have this cap of \$275, at least  
14      in New York City, you are really saying to somebody  
15      that you have to make a choice between your landlord  
16      and your stomach.

17                   And that's all I have to say.

18                   Thank you.

19                   UNDER SECRETARY WATKINS: Thank you.

20      Dierdre Ierardi.

21                   DIERDRE IERARDI: My name is Dierdre  
22      Ierardi. I am the director of the Connecticut  
23      Anti-Hunger Coalition. During the past year we  
24      visited over a hundred food banks. All of across  
25      Connecticut families and individuals are having



1 problems with the Food Stamp Program and are opting  
2 out of the program. We also formed an advisory  
3 committee with mid-level employees at the Department  
4 of Social Services where we discovered that  
5 Connecticut's error rate is over one million dollars.  
6 The high error rate is the result of both client and  
7 state employee confusion about the complex  
8 regulations. The current Food Stamp Program does not  
9 work for clients, nor does it work for states trying  
10 to implement the program. Welfare Reform did not  
11 eliminate poverty.

12 In Connecticut the cost of living is so high  
13 that working families are finding it difficult to feed  
14 their families. The state of Connecticut's Office of  
15 Policy and Management recently published the  
16 Connecticut Self-sufficiency Standard which indicates  
17 that one must earn between \$18 and \$22 an hour to  
18 live on a bare bones budget in our state.

19 Just yesterday a woman came into our office  
20 to ask for advice about the Food Stamp Program. The  
21 family is intact. The father works at a major  
22 Connecticut corporation and the mom is a stay-at-home  
23 mom. They have three children. The father grosses  
24 \$32,000 a year which is well over the 130 percent of  
25 poverty allowed to qualify for assistance with the





1 Food Stamp Program. In order to be self-sufficient  
2 with a family of five, that family needs a gross  
3 income of \$45,000 a year to live in their town in  
4 Connecticut. If the intent of the Congress, the White  
5 House and the USDA is encourage individuals to work  
6 towards self-sufficiency, to stay married and to raise  
7 healthy children, the Food Stamp re-authorization  
8 legislation should implement that intent. As families  
9 move from welfare to work or from poverty to self  
10 sufficiency, the Food Stamp Program should be designed  
11 to provide good nutrition to keep them healthy.

12 The Connecticut Association for Human  
13 Services would like to suggest the following 12 ideas:

14 \* The regulations should be kept simple,  
15 without asset testing.

16 \* The financial eligibility should be based  
17 on a living wage or a self-sufficiency income level  
18 based on geography.

19 \* Senior citizens should have the same  
20 criteria for eligibility as working individuals,  
21 again, with no asset test.

22 \* Applications for participation should be  
23 one page long with a federal tax statement as the  
24 qualifying identification.

25 \* Redetermination should be annual and



1       should be documented by a federal income tax form.  
2       If a person goes beyond the self-sufficiency standard  
3       for a part of the year, they should not be punished  
4       forgetting ahead. The individuals should simply not  
5       be recertified.

6               \* Allocation should also be based on the  
7       cost of living or self-sufficiency standards.  
8       Currently emergency food sites are substitutes for low  
9       applications to needy families. By the third week of  
10      the month, families are forced to use food banks,  
11      pantries and soup kitchens.

12             \* Legal immigrants should qualify for food  
13      stamps. Error rates would decrease, leaving time for  
14      investigating real fraud.

15             \* Allocation should also include the ability  
16      to by toiletries and personal care items.

17             \* Every effort should be made to expand the  
18      opportunity to apply for the program by offering Food  
19      Stamp applications at WIC offices, child health care  
20      offices, employment opportunity offices, child care  
21      centers and schools.

22             \* In rural areas and local areas, local  
23      offices should be available to individuals and seniors  
24      who need to apply.

25             \* Sanctioning should only take place after



1       due process and should not include Food Stamps for  
2       children.

3               I know this is a wish list and I know that  
4       you are going to get a lot of arguments back from it,  
5       but we might as well go for the gold.

6               The primary success of the Food Stamp  
7       Program is that the program has alleviated hunger  
8       across the nation. To build on that success,  
9       assistance should be available until a family reaches  
10      self sufficiency. In a budget which includes housing,  
11      transportation health care, utilities, child care and  
12      food, the only flexible item for a working person is  
13      food.

14              The Food Stamp Program could also be a  
15      mechanism for tracking families after they leave the  
16      TANF program or while they are moving from poverty to  
17      self-sufficiency.

18              Finally, if you truly want to break the  
19      cycle of poverty, children need nutritious meals in  
20      order to stay healthy and achieve academically. The  
21      Food Stamp Program is the vehicle to provide adequate  
22      nutrition.

23              I have attached a summary of some of the  
24      focus groups conducted by the Connecticut Association  
25      for Human Services to this statement and I hope you



1 will take the time to read it.

2 Thank you.

3 UNDER SECRETARY WATKINS: Thank you very  
4 much.

5 We're going to have one more conversation  
6 and then we're going to take a break, if that's okay  
7 with you.

8 Agnes Molnar.

9 AGNES MOLNAR: Good afternoon. I'm Agnes  
10 Molnar with the Community Food Resource Center. We  
11 are very well represented here because our office is  
12 only two blocks away. So you should never have had  
13 this hearing over here.

14 I want to talk to you about a very  
15 successful food stamp outreach project that we  
16 conducted several years ago and it worked so well that  
17 it ended after a year and it was never refunded. But  
18 also as a nutritionist I wanted to say first for a  
19 moment to take the opportunity to talk about the  
20 Thrifty Food Plan which has been referred to before,  
21 but I would love to quote some of the menus and  
22 recipes that USDA nutritionists have come up with to  
23 prove that a family can indeed on their Food Stamp  
24 benefits live within that Thrifty Food Plan.

25 And I have with me a Department of





1       Agriculture booklet from September 1976. And I don't  
2       know how often these menus and recipes are updated,  
3       but I just want to read two recipes. For a family of  
4       four, this is called "Beef Stew with Vegetables" and  
5       it makes four servings. You use three quarters of a  
6       pound of boneless beef chuck steak, etc., etc., etc.,  
7       water, salt, pepper and one onion, four potatoes and  
8       two carrots and feeds a family of four. That's not  
9       even a pound of meat.

10               Another one is called "Grazed Chicken with  
11       Vegetables" - One two-and-a-quarter pound chicken, cut  
12       up, flour, salt, pepper, one carrot, one stalk of  
13       celery and one onion; that's chicken with vegetables.

14               I rest my case.

15               And the other point that I also want to  
16       stress that has been said repeatedly is the error  
17       rates. And I think that probably more than anything  
18       drives the way that Food Stamp Program is implemented  
19       everywhere. And why not look at error rates on the  
20       other side. Make them an error if a person is denied  
21       erroneously or doesn't get the right amount of  
22       benefits. Let's cause that to be a state error as  
23       well and then I think you will see a big improvement  
24       on how they administer the program. I don't know  
25       whether that's feasible.



1                   In 1993 we received a grant from the USDA to  
2                   do a demonstration project, an outreach project on  
3                   food stamps. What we did was we placed two of our  
4                   workers, our own staff, at a Medicaid site. It was  
5                   Medicaid only. And they were there for a year. They  
6                   helped people. We got referrals from Medicaid case  
7                   workers and we helped people fill out applications.  
8                   We also were able to make appointments for those  
9                   people right then and there with the food stamp  
10                  center. We had that agreement with them so we  
11                  immediately gave them appointments to show up. We  
12                  were able to make copies of that Medicaid application.  
13                  It was the same application. We had the same  
14                  information. Those applications were picked up every  
15                  night by the food stamp center and they had them  
16                  available the next morning. It was a really extremely  
17                  successful program and it couldn't have been done  
18                  without the cooperation of the HRA and Food Stamp and  
19                  Medicaid offices.

20                  I just want to give you some of the results.  
21                  Within that twelve-month period we pre-screened 2,781  
22                  people. We found 97 percent of them appeared to be  
23                  eligible. Of those numbers that we referred to the  
24                  Food Stamp office, 83 percent applied and of that  
25                  number 81 percent actually received benefits. And if



1       you have gone through any of these studies, this is a  
2       very remarkable number.

3               We also did a survey to identify barriers.  
4       We asked people why they weren't getting food stamps  
5       and of the 305 people we surveyed who had never  
6       applied for food stamps, by far almost 70 percent said  
7       they didn't think they were eligible. They didn't  
8       know. Almost half thought that poor people weren't  
9       eligible. The other reasons were they thought it was  
10      only for welfare recipients. They didn't know about  
11      the program. They thought that anyone on SSI or SSA  
12      wasn't eligible. They thought they would only get \$10  
13      a month. They thought the application was too hard.  
14      They were too embarrassed to apply. They thought only  
15      citizens were eligible. At that time that wasn't  
16      true. The list goes on.

17             Unfortunately the project ended. I think it  
18      may be an example and a model of things to think about  
19      on how to get more people to participate.

20             Thank you.

21             UNDER SECRETARY WATKINS: Thank you.

22             We'll take a 10-minute break. That will  
23      give you a chance to stretch and get some water and  
24      come back.

25             We will come back in 10 minutes.



1 (WHEREUPON A 10-MINUTE RECESS WAS TAKEN.)

2 UNDER SECRETARY WATKINS: We're going to  
3 start with Christine McKenna.

4 CHRISTINE MCKENNA: Good afternoon. My name  
5 is Christine McKenna and I work for SENSES, the  
6 statewide Emergency Network for Social and Economic  
7 Security. We're a not-for-profit based in Albany, New  
8 York. And my comments today are going to focus on how  
9 food stamps are helping the working poor.

10 In our state the number of working poor  
11 families has increased 60 percent in the 1990s so that  
12 currently we have about 1.2 million New Yorkers who  
13 are leading households where at least one adult is  
14 employed, but they are not over the federal poverty  
15 line. Food stamps helps them and continue to be a  
16 crucial piece of these families meeting their basic  
17 needs.

18 I am going to suggest four ways that you can  
19 help these working families even more than currently  
20 you are doing.

21 \* The first is increasing access to the  
22 social service offices.

23 \* The second is updating the income and  
24 resources limits.

25 \* The third is simplifying the application





1       and recertification process.

2               \* And the fourth is updating the benefits  
3       level.

4               And I am going to go through each one of  
5       these briefly now.

6               The first issue, access to social service  
7       offices, as one of our first speakers mentioned, a  
8       number of organizations in New York have recently been  
9       doing a survey about access in New York and we have  
10      heard that of 52 counties of our 57 upstate counties,  
11      only two of them have evening or weekend hours. This  
12      is a real hardship for people that are working typical  
13      9:00 to 5:00 hours. Some of them said we can stay  
14      open during lunch for folks to come in. Maybe we can  
15      squeeze the time back to 8:30 in the morning, open a  
16      little bit early in the morning. It really is  
17      impossible for people working traditional hours to  
18      make it in. Fifteen of those counties do offer flex  
19      time, so at the discretion of the worker, they might  
20      agree to stay a little bit later or come in a couple  
21      of hours earlier to help people that are working. But  
22      it's a really ad hoc basis. Folks may not know to  
23      ask for it and it isn't always available to people.

24              Another way to increase access to encourage  
25      or force district offices to actually set real



1        appointment times with clients. One of the things  
2        that happens is that districts tell everyone to come  
3        in at 9:00 or tell half the people to come in at 1:00,  
4        so people sit there for hours and hours waiting to see  
5        a case worker when in reality most businesses have  
6        been able to figure out how their client base comes in  
7        during the day. I am sure most of the offices know.  
8        And if they don't know already, ask them to find out  
9        what their no-show rate is so they can plan ahead and  
10       ask people to come in at times throughout the day and  
11       know they are going to be seen actually when they  
12       arrive.

13                    Another way to improve access is to  
14       encourage satellite offices or out-station those  
15       workers. Fourteen of our counties have more than one  
16       office. That means an awful lot of them have huge  
17       distances that have only one office that might be  
18       really activity to reach.

19                    Twelve of the counties out-station workers  
20       for at least one day a month at a different part of  
21       the county, and one of those counties I know, Albany,  
22       where we are from.

23                    Another way to improve access is to waive  
24       the face-to-face interview. It's really difficult for  
25       people to make it to the office if they can either do



1 a phone interview or know about the authorized  
2 representative option, or even waive it all together  
3 and take people at their word that they need help,  
4 then that can improve access to the program for  
5 workers.

6 The second issue that I said I was going to  
7 talk about is updating the income and resources limit.  
8 We have heard a couple of times issues of automobiles  
9 and I just want to let you know that a third of our  
10 rural households in New York live in counties where  
11 there is no public transportation at all and another  
12 third live in counties where there is minimal  
13 transportation. You really need a car if you are  
14 going to hold down a job in rural areas in New York.  
15 And it doesn't make sense to punish people for having  
16 a reliable vehicle that gets them to work, gets them  
17 to child care and gets them to pick up their children  
18 on times from the child care at the end of the day.

19 The third issue is simplifying the  
20 application and recertification process. We have  
21 heard that several times as well. The fastest growing  
22 industry in New York between the years 1992 and 1998  
23 was personnel supply services. What that means is  
24 temporary services. That's our fastest growing  
25 industry, is finding people jobs as temps in offices



1       and manufacturing and other fields. And what we know  
2       about temporary work is that your hours change from  
3       week to week. So this week you are called in for a  
4       day. Next week you might be called in three. After  
5       that you get overtime. It's possible to keep track of  
6       that at the food stamps office. If you have to record  
7       every change of \$25, it just becomes a nightmare  
8       trying to keep your worker informed. They aren't able  
9       to budget correctly. It really is a nightmare. And  
10      so we encourage a certification period where if you  
11      are discovered to be eligible today, that should be  
12      the same for six months or a year out from there  
13      rather than these constant rebudgeting.

14               And the fourth issues is updating the  
15      benefits level. We have heard several times that  
16      foods stamps don't last to the end of the month. We  
17      really need to make it worthwhile to people to apply  
18      for benefits and actually get the amount of money that  
19      is really going to make a difference for them. The  
20      \$10 minimum is just simply not enough.

21               In closing, I just want to reiterate the  
22      value of food stamps for people who aren't expected to  
23      hold employment like seniors or children. They are  
24      equally important for people who have significant  
25      issues that are going to prevent them from ever being





1       able to support themselves fully on their own. So I  
2       hope you will implement some of these changes and  
3       increase access for working families.

4               UNDER SECRETARY WATKINS: Thank you.

5               Andrea Strother.

6               ANDREA STROTHER: We enter the building and  
7       I'm asked to empty my pockets and the contents of my  
8       purse onto the table. I am then instructed to walk  
9       through a metal detector. And once I'm through the  
10      metal detector, I'm asked to raise both of my arms as  
11      a wand is waved up and down my body and I'm asked to  
12      turn around again so they can do that to the back side  
13      of my body as well. Once I'm through the metal  
14      detector, I'm instructed that I'm going to have my mug  
15      shot -- oh, excuse me, picture taken and then I'm  
16      going to be finger imaged -- finger printed. And I  
17      think to myself how can this be done and how did this  
18      happen. Why am I being treated as if I have broken  
19      the law. I feel humiliated and embarrassed. I feel  
20      angry and I walk out. And I want to ask why I'm being  
21      treated this way. And then I remembered my child is  
22      standing next to me and that we're here, that I'm here  
23      because I need food stamps. And people ask why is the  
24      participation rate down.

25              And that portion that I just read to you,



1       it's not that I forgot that. It's that it didn't hit  
2       me how upsetting it was to me until I wrote it.

3               My name is Andrea Strother. I have one  
4       child and I have been a single parent for the past 11  
5       years. I am currently working towards completing my  
6       Masters degree in social work and I'm an intern in the  
7       statewide Network for Social and Economic Security. I  
8       bring a well-rounded perspective to this conversation  
9       because of my professional involvement in the field  
10      and I have been put in that position for several  
11      years.

12             I am here to today to tell you about my  
13      experience in reference to the stigma attached to  
14      those things. From the moment I walk through the  
15      doors at the Department of Social Services and every  
16      time I use food stamps at the grocery store, I am  
17      treated as if I have committed some awful crime. The  
18      stigma may be reduced at the store through use of  
19      electronic benefits, however EBT will not reduce the  
20      stigma as long as this program is housed and  
21      administered in the Department of Social Services.

22             Most people believe that the members of the  
23      program are irresponsible and do not work. And I may  
24      not be employed in the true sense of the term, but  
25      believe me, I work. I am a full-time student pulling



1 a full course load in school in addition to 24  
2 internship hours required for my degree.

3 As a single parent I have assumed all the  
4 responsibilities related to raising my child. What I  
5 accomplish in one day would make two parents drop to  
6 the ground. I am a loving mother who is devoted to my  
7 child. I am an involved and active member of my  
8 community and in my son's school. I bake for every  
9 bake sale. I chaperone on school trips when my  
10 schedule allows me to. I communicate with his  
11 teachers and I spend four to six hours every week  
12 helping him with his homework and with his school  
13 projects. I believe that I have taught and continue  
14 to teach my son the intrinsic value of helping others  
15 and the importance of having an education.

16 My son doesn't know he is poor. He doesn't  
17 know he is poor because we have food to eat and  
18 because we have a nice place to live and because I  
19 have taught him to look at what he has and not what he  
20 does not have. I have been informed by my DSS worker  
21 that on my son's twelfth birthday which is December  
22 1st of 2000 I will be required to participate in a  
23 work fare position in order for us to continue  
24 receiving food stamps. With the work fare  
25 participation in my future, my son and I will no



1 longer be eligible food stamps because of my "failure  
2 to engage in work activities." At least that is what  
3 they will say on my notice to discontinue.

4 What I do in my life is not extraordinary.  
5 I represent thousands of other people who are doing  
6 just as much or more than I am doing. What we do is  
7 and should be considered work. Many of the people  
8 here today utilize a top down approach towards change  
9 and I am also suggesting that we take a bottom up  
10 approach that starts with changing the cultural  
11 climate and ways in which those who use food stamps  
12 are treated by those who deliver services.

13 In conclusion, I would like to make the  
14 following suggestions for the Food Stamp program.

15 \* Remove the Food Stamp Program from the  
16 Department of Social Services. And I understand there  
17 is a lot of people who don't agree with that  
18 suggestion because it implies that people who are  
19 receiving welfare are going to be further stigmatized.

20 My son and I received welfare for three  
21 years and we have moved off TANF into the non-public  
22 assistance Food Stamp category. The only thing that  
23 has changed is I don't get \$296 a month from welfare  
24 anymore. We still get food stamps. We still get  
25 Medicaid, but I'm not considered to be a welfare





1       recipient.

2               \* Restructure and create a new system that  
3       reduces stigma, employees benefit and resource levels  
4       that adequately reflect the current economy.

5               I asked somebody else to look up when were  
6       these levels established. 1978. We're in the year  
7       2000. It just doesn't make any sense to me.

8               \* Eliminate the worker (inaudible) into the  
9       program. As it was mentioned earlier, why is the Food  
10      Stamp office doing employment, determining who is  
11      going to work and who is not going to work and how  
12      they are going to gain employment?

13              \* operating hours beyond regular business  
14      hours. When I have to recertify, I have to send a  
15      notice that says I shall report at 10 a.m. or 2 p.m.  
16      If I cannot make it, I can call and that means I can  
17      come in on a walk-in basis and spend the entire day in  
18      the office, meaning I am missing an entire day of  
19      class, an entire day of internship, or for somebody  
20      who is, in fact, working, an entire day of work.

21              \* Simplifying the application and  
22      recertification process. Having staff to help with  
23      the applications and hiring culturally competent staff  
24      and provide diversity training for the existing staff  
25      wherever the program is administered.



1                   \* (Inaudible) I would be happy to sit on one  
2                   of these panels so that we can share our experiences  
3                   of what it is like to walk into someplace that as in  
4                   my earlier description, like you are going into  
5                   prison. I feel very passionate about this because I  
6                   have lived this for a very long time. What happens to  
7                   most of us is that this becomes an everyday thing, the  
8                   degradation, the humiliation becomes a normal thing  
9                   until we almost don't even see it anymore.

10                   What are you going to do when your child has  
11                   to eat?

12                   Thank you for letting me share my thoughts  
13                   with you.

14                   UNDER SECRETARY WATKINS: Mike Rosen (No  
15                   response.

16                   Heidi Siegfried.

17                   HEIDI SIEGFRIED: I'm Heidi Siegfried and I  
18                   am a staff attorney with the Rural Law Center and we  
19                   serve low income people in the 44 counties of New York  
20                   State that Cornell University considers rural.

21                   We think that the Food Stamp Program is an  
22                   important comfort to what has been increasing poverty  
23                   in New York State. We don't have a booming economy in  
24                   New York. The median family income has declined since  
25                   1989. All of the top one-fifth of workers have



1       experienced a decrease in income and it's around 15  
2       percent and the number of New Yorkers in poverty has  
3       increased. So we can't attribute these declining food  
4       stamp rolls to any great economy, at least not in New  
5       York.

6               Rural economies are really unique. You  
7       don't have a big employer. And for poor people, what  
8       they are doing is kind of patching together an income.  
9       So you often find situations where people are working  
10      in the woods making maple sugar and they pick up a  
11      little hey. People are sort of putting together a  
12      living and it's probably kind of hard to report to the  
13      Food Stamp office.

14             I represent people that may have a lawn care  
15      business when the weather is good for lawns and then  
16      when then snows removal business in the winter. So  
17      their income varies and they really are struggling and  
18      patching this together.

19             Just to give you an idea of what happens in  
20      the economy, especially in the rural economy with ABAR  
21      (phonetic) regulations is I encountered a number of  
22      clients that were working but they were working less  
23      than 20 hours a week so I had clients who were  
24      probably working to his capacity -- I think he had  
25      some mental issues -- as a school crossing guard and



1 he couldn't be put into some work fare site and still  
2 to his employment.

3 I had another client who worked as a home  
4 health aid. She only had two clients that she served  
5 and therefore she was working less than 20 hours a  
6 week. When we got a third client and was working more  
7 than 20 hours a week, you said, hey, guess what, you  
8 are not eligible for food stamps. She wasn't going to  
9 put up with that. The way she had been treated during  
10 the previous three months, forget it. So that's one  
11 of the problems that I see with ABAR that I wanted to  
12 bring up.

13 The effects of welfare reform have really  
14 been the cause of the decimation of the Food Stamp  
15 rolls, particularly the time limits and the  
16 elimination of any federal entitlement. What we  
17 really need in New York is more monitoring and we need  
18 a QC process that balances the error rate on the one  
19 side, getting people onto benefits. So whatever you  
20 can do to increase that monitoring.

21 In New York the whole welfare reform and the  
22 time limits, even though we don't have time limits in  
23 New York, have been complicated by the fact that we do  
24 have doesn't 58 social service districts and they  
25 aren't monitored very strongly by the Office of





1 Temporary Disability Assistance. I'm sure you have  
2 seen this problem too because you get, you know, 56.  
3 Try to monitor where you maybe didn't have to monitor  
4 them as closely before.

5 What we're finding is that this is real  
6 interesting, that the time limits while we don't have  
7 time limits in New York because we have a constitution  
8 that says we have to continue to provide assistance to  
9 people, there is still a lot of pressure to get people  
10 off the case load at five years because the  
11 responsibility for paying those people will fall on  
12 the state and the county and no longer on the federal  
13 government. So maybe in other states you might have  
14 people moving off because they had a time limit and  
15 they would continue to get food stamps, but in New  
16 York the contortions that counties have gone through  
17 to try to those peoples' cases is just amazing. So  
18 what they had to do is when they can't get rid of  
19 sanctioned families, people through the work programs,  
20 they had to come up with conditions of eligibility.  
21 So what we are doing is we're calling things that look  
22 like work programs conditions of eligibility. You  
23 make people to come in more often and you find some  
24 way that they fail to meet a condition of eligibility  
25 and no legislature is effective at the time.



1                   So these conditions of eligibility are  
2                   invented not just for public assistance but also for  
3                   food stamps. Because there is no obligation to report  
4                   this to the Office of Temporary Disability Assistance,  
5                   they just invent these programs and they cut people  
6                   off public assistance and food stamps at the same time  
7                   and nobody ever finds out about it. So, it really  
8                   does need more monitoring.

9                   And unfortunately, one thing that our recent  
10                  studies have found is that legal services offices are  
11                  doing welfare work so they are not able to pick up the  
12                  slack and we really need to get the state and the  
13                  federal government to do some of this.

14                 Yesterday I was talking with one of these  
15                 victims of one of these work programs, a disabled  
16                 client who had his case closed because they weren't  
17                 able to accommodate his disability at the work site so  
18                 they had to assign him to find his own work site and  
19                 he failed to do that. So his food stamps and his  
20                 (inaudible) were cut off. He lives up in New York  
21                 near the Canadian border. So anyway he has gotten  
22                 Social Security disability and I was talking to him  
23                 about that and he said that because his income will be  
24                 just under the poverty level I suggested that he might  
25                 continue to be eligible for the food stamps. Again,



1       he is not going to have anything to do with the food  
2       stamp after the treatment that he has had on the  
3       phone. Forget it. And that's really what we're  
4       finding. This whole emphasis on the work programs,  
5       they just don't deal with reality. They don't deal  
6       with the barriers that people have, the disabilities  
7       that people have. I would say that if you were dead  
8       they would say you could be a model for a casket  
9       company. There is no recognition of who people are in  
10      any kind of individualized way which is what we need  
11      with the case load that we have left.

12               So this man was going to have nothing to do  
13      with the food stamp office and I think that's really  
14      what we need to do is to figure out a way for people  
15      to get food stamps and have nothing to do with the  
16      food stamp office. I think it's really impossible.  
17      Years ago we had a commissioner in New York who came  
18      in and he put out the administrative directive that  
19      you had to treat recipients with dignity. And that's  
20      not really enforceable. It's really going to be hard  
21      to train these people to treat clients in a better  
22      way. It's got to be not requiring them to come in for  
23      face-to-face interviews as much as possible. We need  
24      to have longer certification periods, mail-in  
25      applications, phone applications, internet



1        applications to limit their interaction with the  
2        Social Services office. Of course, the trend has been  
3        trying to bring people in on a monthly basis at least  
4        to be certified, then maybe you can get rid of them if  
5        they fail to do so.

6                I think that some of these proposals have  
7        longer certification periods than transitional  
8        benefits. Like maybe my client will forget how badly  
9        he was treated and after six months maybe he would  
10       continue his food stamps. So I think the longer  
11       certification period suggestion for them are really  
12       important.

13               Of course the most important reason I think  
14       that you need to let the certification period exist  
15       because of the treatment that people receive at  
16       welfare and Food Stamp offices, but also because I  
17       said earlier one of the reasons why we need to do  
18       these kinds of things is that it is difficult for  
19       people to get long distances into the office and as  
20       you know, with gas prices going up, this is an expense  
21       to be constantly reporting.

22               We need to have more satellite offices. We  
23       need to allow other agencies to take applications. We  
24       need to have an increase in the Thrifty Food Plan, to  
25       the low cost food plan or incentive food plan. We





1       need to eliminate the gross income test for mentally  
2       disabled. Increase earned income deductions. As  
3       Brian Wing mentioned, in New York we have a much  
4       higher earned income deduction. Increase the shelter  
5       deductions, the child care deductions and make  
6       (inaudible) available to non-disabled people.

7               As you know, Congress still hasn't figured  
8       out what to do about prescriptions. (Inaudible).  
9       The treatment of people at Food Stamp offices is the  
10      most important barrier that we need to figure out how  
11      to overcome. People do put their dignity and how they  
12      are treated above basic human needs like food.

13             UNDER SECRETARY WATKINS: Thank you very  
14      much.

15             We have a caller, Keith Talbot.

16             KEITH TALBOT: Hello. My name is Keith  
17      Talbot and I work as an attorney with the (inaudible).

18             UNDER SECRETARY WATKINS: Is the other  
19      caller ready?

20             CALLER: Good afternoon. My name is  
21      Reverend Mandell of the Municipal Church of Good  
22      Shepherd in (inaudible) Massachusetts located just off  
23      of Cape Cod. I am also president of the local  
24      ministerial association and we have been quite  
25      involved in ministries involving food here. In fact,



1 we even have a soup kitchen at our church and have  
2 come across a few things that might be of help with  
3 the Food Stamp Program.

4 First I want to say to you the program is a  
5 marvelous one. In fact, I was a beneficiary in my  
6 youth. It has served have to provide nutritious food  
7 to people in need.

8 We've got an interesting situation here  
9 whereas Cape Cod is often seen as a rather affluent  
10 area and an area that may not need such things. Many  
11 of our clients who come to the church in fact  
12 borderline homeless. They are required to live in the  
13 woods in tents during the summer because they are  
14 forced out of their rental units to make way for more  
15 affluent summertime guests. The cost of housing and  
16 fuel has just rocketed out of site. As a result, our  
17 kitchen, even during the summer where provisions  
18 would have been for a little less clientele has  
19 continued to rise. And what we hear from the people  
20 here is that they are really running up against a rock  
21 and a hard spot in trying to come up with provisions  
22 for food. And there is a hang time, delay between the  
23 time when they make application for food stamps and  
24 when they receive them. I regularly am distributing  
25 what we have in terms of discretionary funds or a



1       system where people will come for several weeks before  
2       they would receive their stamps. So one idea may be  
3       perhaps to reconsider some form of interim relief that  
4       allow access to food in this period of time.

5               Secondly, the cost of the area. On Cape Cod  
6       itself and rapidly spreading, our current figures  
7       indicate that even a single person making \$40,000 a  
8       year cannot find adequate housing and provide for  
9       themselves. So we are finding people who exceed the  
10      poverty level but extensively and quite beyond the  
11      poverty level who are unable to find housing, much  
12      less food. Perhaps in consideration of looking at the  
13      cost index. I hope figures are available on this and  
14      in fact even with federal travel and state travel you  
15      also have high cost areas that some form of cost index  
16      might be considered for determining eligibility in  
17      amount of food stamps given.

18             We have also discovered a lot of confusion  
19      over eligibility for stamps. And I realize a couple  
20      is the distinction between welfare and welfare reform  
21      and the nutrition program, thus food stamps. But many  
22      people who come here don't know the difference and  
23      they feel if they are not eligible for welfare then  
24      they are not eligible for food stamps. (Inaudible)  
25      something along the lines of clarification of that I



1 think would be good.

2 And finally I have two cases where  
3 possession of a vehicle in excess of \$4,000 has lead  
4 to disqualification for families who would otherwise  
5 qualify. The problem is that two-thirds of the  
6 children here in middle school qualify for free and  
7 reduced school lunch. That you need a vehicle and the  
8 inspection program for Massachusetts holds you  
9 accountable and the interest is such that a vehicle is  
10 going to have to cost some money before it can even  
11 pass inspection and these people rely on vehicles to  
12 travel. A woman the other day called in, a single  
13 mother, for assistance travelled as far as New  
14 Hampshire, driving almost two hours in either  
15 direction. And yet if they sell the vehicle, what are  
16 they going to get? They still need the car to travel.  
17 And if you get much below \$4,000, you won't have  
18 anything that is road worthy much less pass  
19 inspection.

20 I just purchased a 995 Ford Escort with  
21 100,000 miles on it and the price of that car was  
22 \$4,500. If you don't have much in the way of  
23 vehicles and I don't what your flexibility is to  
24 reconsider that particular area. So I really think  
25 what we face here is we have a high cost of living in





1       this area and we have got a lot of homeless people and  
2       people who have hunger issues.

3               Secondly, simplifying it so that if we can't  
4       get the stamps to the people sooner that there be an  
5       easier interim program for temporary relief until they  
6       get on the program.

7               Clearing up some confusion over eligibility  
8       and separating the issues of welfare reform, which I  
9       don't think is intended to be Food Stamp reform per se  
10      so that people know they can come in and get involved.  
11      And looking at the whole thing, the automobile  
12      disqualifications that currently. So I do thank you  
13      for your time and attention and best of luck in this  
14      work and we'll pray that something good comes of it  
15      and thank you again and good-bye.

16              UNDER SECRETARY WATKINS: Monica Tejeda.

17              MONICA TEJEDA: My name is Monica Tejeda.  
18      I'm a Dominican woman. I am a member of the Committee  
19      for Equality for Our Community. I am struggling hard  
20      against the injustice that exists in the welfare  
21      centers. Enough already, Giuliani with the  
22      discrimination against immigrants and welfare  
23      recipients.

24              My experience is that when my apartment  
25      burned down, the Red Cross gave me a paper that I



1       could take to welfare so that they could help me with  
2       my most basic needs. The person that saw me in the  
3       center did not speak Spanish and what they told me is  
4       that I should go home and just wait for a letter.  
5       This was not right because I had an emergency. I did  
6       not have clothes or money because my apartment had  
7       burned down. In short, the worker did not want to  
8       help me. I have proof in my hand that she ignored me.  
9       I never received the letter that she promised.

10               Because of this experience, I joined the  
11       Committee for Equality for Our Community to fight for  
12       what is just with other members of my community. I  
13       want a stop to this discrimination. Now, I go to the  
14       welfare centers and inform the community that they  
15       themselves should join our struggle to fight for our  
16       rights.

17               UNDER SECRETARY WATKINS: Thank you, Monica.  
18       Arania Sanchez.

19               ARANIA SANCHEZ: Good afternoon to everyone.  
20       I am a member of Make the Road by Walking and the  
21       Committed for Equality for Our Community. I am Arania  
22       Sanchez and my daughter's name is Gabriella Varella  
23       (phonetic). She was born in Brooklyn on June 20, 1998  
24       and she's a citizen of the United States. I am 31  
25       years old and I was born in Managua, Nicaragua. I



1        have lived in the United States for 12 years and I  
2        have worked since I arrived in this country. And I  
3        have studied. I was living in Los Angeles, California  
4        for almost two years. I arrived in New York in 1991  
5        in order to be near my grandmother and my family.  
6        Also I came with the desire to make progress and to be  
7        somebody important in this country. If you were to  
8        investigate my record at all of the jobs that I have  
9        held in New York, you would see that I have left all  
10       of my bosses smiling and very satisfied with my work.  
11       I am a person who works hard.

12                Since my marriage broke up I was left by  
13       myself to care for my daughter Gabriella. It turned  
14       out that she has a variety of bronchial problems and  
15       asthma. As a result of these circumstances, I have no  
16       alternative but to seek support from the government to  
17       be able to be available to help my daughter comply  
18       with her medication regimen. I have to hook her up to  
19       a machine to clean her lungs every six hours.

20                When I went to the welfare center it was  
21       very difficult for me to communicate with the social  
22       workers because they only spoke English and I speak  
23       Spanish. My little bit of English is not enough to  
24       enable us to understand each other. I had many  
25       difficulties applying for benefits. These



1       difficulties affected my little daughter even more  
2       than they affected me. My social worker had no  
3       interest in giving my daughter emergency Medicaid,  
4       even though I brought him two letters, one from the  
5       general practitioner and another from a lung doctor.  
6       The worker was not helpful and treated me very badly,  
7       saying insulting things about Hispanic people. I felt  
8       very badly because of him and was in a state of  
9       desperation because he was so unconcerned about the  
10      health of my daughter that I cried.

11               Thanks to the help of the organization, Make  
12      the Road by Walking and the Committee for Equality for  
13      Our Community, I began to feel better because a group  
14      of people and organizers was working to resolve  
15      problems like the one I have and to inform people  
16      about the rights that each of us have, especially  
17      because so many of us are unaware what the laws really  
18      are here in New York State.

19               I'm seeing almost every day that the  
20      problems of the welfare centers are worsening and it  
21      breaks my heart to see so many people desperate  
22      because their rights have been violated. How is it  
23      possible that the rights of our children are being  
24      each day more disrespected.

25               Remember that the children are the future of





1       this country. Do not forget that if there is not good  
2       nurturing and learning available to the young, they  
3       can have difficult time achieving their dreams in  
4       country.

5               Please make them respect federal Civil  
6       Rights of poor people that do not speak English. You  
7       all know that we are flesh and bone and that we bleed  
8       just like you do.

9               Do not ignore the law because the children  
10      are watching their mothers suffer and this is  
11      affecting them. We must put an end to this  
12      discrimination that every day worsens in New York City  
13      against us, the immigrant community. I am very  
14      afraid, not just of the police, but also the welfare  
15      centers. Giuliani is forcing the people to rise up  
16      and defend their rights. You as representatives of  
17      the federal government have an obligation to create  
18      justice in this state. We have heard many promises  
19      from federal officials, but we have seen the suffering  
20      and discrimination remain unchanged or even worst than  
21      before.

22              Do not make us feel that democracy does not  
23      exist. I believe in democracy and in a strong future  
24      for this country. We cannot permit them to dirty our  
25      democracy with all of this discrimination that is



1       happening here in New York. I believe that it is  
2       enough already and that democracy needs to demonstrate  
3       to the immigrant community that hope and justice  
4       exists for the future of this country.

5               Please help us and take strong heartfelt  
6       action. We do not need words. We need action and we  
7       need justice. The people are awaiting your answer.  
8       It is an emergency.

9               Thank you. Have a good day.

10              UNDER SECRETARY WATKINS: Jim Claffey.

11              JIM CLAFFEY: My name is Jim Claffey. I'm  
12       the advocacy director of the New York Immigration  
13       Coalition which is an umbrella advocacy and policy  
14       organization here in the city. We are about 200  
15       groups in the state that work with newcomers,  
16       refugees, immigrants, in a variety of ways. Thank you  
17       for holding this forum because it is very important  
18       that we continue the dialogue about all aspects of the  
19       food program.

20              I am going to abbreviate as I go and leave  
21       you a written testimony.

22              UNDER SECRETARY WATKINS: Thank you very  
23       much. And if we could just remind people to do the  
24       same so that we can get everybody on this afternoon.

25              JIM CLAFFEY: Immigrants face many of the



1 same problems with the Food Stamp Program as other  
2 poverty-stricken populations, but also additional  
3 specific barriers as well.

4 First of all, let me say that nearly a  
5 million lawfully present immigrants lost Food Stamp  
6 eligibility in 1996. The Food Stamp Program is the  
7 only public benefits program in recent history where  
8 those working poor who were receiving benefits were  
9 thrown off of the program after having played by the  
10 rules of the system.

11 The federal Food Stamp Program has had more  
12 restrictions for immigrants than any other federal,  
13 state or local program. Many immigrants are not able  
14 to access food stamps benefits at all because of the  
15 arbitrary cut-off date created by the 1996 so-called  
16 Welfare Reform Act which made many lawfully present  
17 immigrants lose access to food stamps. But there is  
18 also an anomaly connected to this. The Food Stamp  
19 Program denies access to this necessary program for  
20 newly arrived immigrants when they truly need the  
21 help. Studies show that when they first arrive  
22 immigrants are in more need of that help than later on  
23 when they are established working and part of the  
24 community. So only once settled and then less likely  
25 to need the help are they then eligible which strikes



1       us as exactly the opposite of the way the program  
2       should work.

3               In addition, new eligibility requirements  
4       can be complicated and confusing. When you add to  
5       that the fear and the misinformation that exists, many  
6       eligible immigrants are totally prevented from  
7       accessing the benefits that they need and monitoring  
8       by immigrant rights organizations has revealed that  
9       public service agencies are making little effort to  
10      have these policies explained for newcomers with  
11      limited English proficiency.

12             In a city where immigrants make up nearly  
13      two-thirds of the population it strikes us as totally  
14      unacceptable that HRA and other city agencies do not  
15      supply access to their services for non-English  
16      speakers. As has been said, our coalition along with  
17      other groups filed a complaint with the Office of  
18      Civil Rights at HHS to address some of these problems.  
19      In response, OCR found that public assistance offices  
20      in New York City, Suffolk and Nassau counties as well  
21      failed to provide limited English proficient persons  
22      with adequate language assistance. We anticipate that  
23      within the next few weeks the Office of Civil Rights  
24      will issue a settlement plan that we hope will finally  
25      propose adequate interpretation and translation





1 services within HRA.

2 We also firmly believe that eligibility for  
3 food stamps should be based on need not on arbitrary  
4 dates of entry or specific status questions.  
5 Immigrants pay taxes and their tax dollars support  
6 these very programs. In fact, many studies show that  
7 immigrants pay more in taxes than they cost the  
8 government, especially over the long run. Most  
9 immigrant taxes now go to the federal government and  
10 many states end up therefore with the unfair burden  
11 when they choose to spend their own money to support  
12 food stamps for immigrants. Since immigration  
13 policies are determined by the federal government, the  
14 cost of programs such as the Food Stamp Program should  
15 not be born solely by the states.

16 This next point I think is very important.  
17 The Food Stamp Program must look at families as a  
18 unit. What seriously affects one member eventually  
19 will have its effect on other members of the family.  
20 Seventy-five percent of all children in  
21 immigrant-headed families are U.S. citizens who are  
22 affected by Food Stamp restrictions, as are entire  
23 immigrant communities. An unqualified parent may live  
24 in a household with various eligible members. As  
25 non-citizen parent and siblings lose benefits, there



1 is a sharp decline in total household resources that  
2 can place many children, including citizen children at  
3 risk of hunger. Community service providers are  
4 unfairly burdened by high demand for such services as  
5 food banks and soup kitchens in the absence of help  
6 from the federal government.

7 I am going to skip down to our final  
8 recommendation. They are, I think, five. Our  
9 recommendations to improve the food stamp program:

10 \* First of all, let all immigrants be  
11 treated fairly. Immigrants should have equal access  
12 to the Food Stamp Program just like all other  
13 residents of the United States. We should not  
14 discriminate based on date of arrival or immigration  
15 status. Poor immigrants deserve to be treated the  
16 same as citizens under the Food Stamp Program since  
17 they pay the same taxes to support that program.

18 \* Secondly, we need to create a clear policy  
19 of confidentiality to eliminate the overriding fear in  
20 immigrant communities that accessing food stamps will  
21 later on have immigration consequences against them.

22 \* We need to implement a comprehensive  
23 language access policy and monitor states and  
24 localities to insure compliance. It's interesting  
25 that we have an interpreter present here today who has



1       done a good job translating Spanish. We wish that  
2       could happen at a lot of the public service agencies  
3       that provide these services. We need a translator  
4       there more than we do in this gathering here today.

5               \* We need to provide simple educational and  
6       outreach materials for member communities in their  
7       native languages to educate and allay fears about  
8       negative consequences of such participation in the  
9       Food Stamp Program.

10              \* Lastly, we need to change the image of the  
11       Food Stamp Program from one that is seen and  
12       experienced as a welfare program to one that is viewed  
13       as providing a basic human right. Consequently, the  
14       entire application process has to be restructured to  
15       encourage rather than to discourage participation.

16              Thank you very much.

17              UNDER SECRETARY WATKINS: Amy Taylor.

18              AMY TAYLOR: Hi. Good afternoon. My name  
19       is Amy Taylor. I with the New York Immigration  
20       Coalition as well, however, I will be reading a  
21       statement of the policy coordinator of the  
22       Massachusetts Immigrant and Refugee Advocacy  
23       Coalition.

24              The Massachusetts Immigrant and Refugee  
25       Advocacy Coalition is a statewide multi-ethnic and



1 multi-racial coalition with over 130 organizational  
2 members which serves as a voice for fairness and  
3 justice for immigrants and refugees in the state.  
4 MIRAC offices provides technical assistance and  
5 training to community-based organizations that help  
6 immigrants and refugees enroll in food stamps and  
7 other services.

8           In Massachusetts we are lucky. After the  
9 1996 federal welfare law eliminated food stamps for  
10 most legal immigrants, Massachusetts took the option  
11 to purchase food stamps from the federal government  
12 and in doing so provided nutritional access to all  
13 legal immigrants in the state. However, our  
14 legislature also warned us that the state will not  
15 make this financial commitment forever and that food  
16 stamps are a federal responsibility. With this  
17 warning we are fearful that a downturn in the economy  
18 or a shift in political mood will have dire  
19 consequences on the low income immigrant population.

20           As you are well aware, as some members of  
21 the household are excluded from receiving food stamps,  
22 the entire household eats less. While the purpose of  
23 cutting benefits to immigrants in the welfare law may  
24 have been to promote self-sufficiency, it has hurt the  
25 very immigrant families and their children who are





1       trying to be self sufficient.

2               A study conducted by a research organization  
3       in Massachusetts found that immigrants earn 75 to 85  
4       percent of the wages of native workers. Immigrants  
5       are working and are paying taxes, but they are also in  
6       desperate need of the Federal Nutritional Safety Net  
7       that was created for families like theirs. As such,  
8       the urgency to support such measures as the Hunger  
9       Relief Act which restores food stamps to all legal  
10      immigrants. However, even if food stamps are  
11      restored, immigrants do not have access to the  
12      program. Although the Massachusetts Food Stamp  
13      Program is available to all legal immigrants,  
14      immigrant participation of citizen children in  
15      immigrant families continue to drop at a rate that far  
16      exceeds that of native-born individuals. Nationwide,  
17      75 percent of citizen children of immigrant parents  
18      dropped off the food stamp rolls by 1998. We know  
19      that USDA is aware of this trend.

20             I would like to highlight three policies  
21      that currently prevent access and suggest solutions  
22      and these are suggestions that is here in New York we  
23      support as well.

24             \* The first one is language access.  
25      Agencies that administer the Food Stamp Program are



1 required to comply with Title 6 of the Civil Rights  
2 Act of 1964 by providing access to applicants and  
3 recipients for a limited English proficiency.  
4 However, in practice, this is often not the case.  
5 MIRAC has received numerous phones calls from  
6 community-based organizations who report that  
7 immigrants are denied interpreters, told to bring  
8 their own interpreter, forced to use small children as  
9 interpreters and are not provided with translated  
10 materials. The result is that immigrants either walk  
11 away out food stamps for their children or are  
12 sanctioned when they do not comply with the  
13 requirements of the program.

14 While we are pleased that the Department has  
15 created thresholds for written materials, it is clear  
16 that stronger and clearer guidances are needed for the  
17 states under Title 6.

18 Furthermore, culturally and linguistically  
19 appropriate outreach methods are necessary to  
20 encourage immigrants to apply for the program.

21 \* Two, verification of immigration status.  
22 A high number of U.S. citizen children reside in  
23 immigrant-headed households. As such, many times the  
24 children are eligible for the Food Stamp Program and  
25 the parents are not. However, these children are



1 often denied food stamps when their ineligible parents  
2 are unable to provide a Social Security number or  
3 proof of their own immigration status. This practice  
4 at social service agencies only heightens the climate  
5 of fear immigrant communities about the relationship  
6 between benefit agencies and the INS.

7 The result is the belief that ineligible  
8 parents will have to choose between feeding their  
9 children and possible repercussions from the INS.

10 To ameliorate the situation families should  
11 be able to designate members as non-applicants before  
12 proceeding with verification of immigration status.  
13 This practice would follow the proposed rule of the  
14 Department of Justice to verify only the immigration  
15 status of the applicant. Additionally, household  
16 members who do not want their status verified with the  
17 INS should be given the option of withdrawing their  
18 application.

19 \* The last one is deeming. The USDA  
20 proposed rule changes household income is counted for  
21 immigrants. The new rule would attribute the  
22 sponsor's income to the sponsored immigrant's entire  
23 family, even when the sponsored immigrant is  
24 ineligible for food stamps. This practice would  
25 penalize many children, including citizens who would



1 no longer be eligible for food stamps. The rule  
2 should attribute only the sponsor's income to the  
3 sponsored immigrant and not other household members.

4 Thank you for giving us the opportunity to  
5 speak.

6 UNDER SECRETARY WATKINS: Thank you.

7 Bill Ayres.

8 MOLLY SELLNER: Excuse me. I actually am  
9 next. I actually topped the list. I am actually  
10 before them. I just want to know if I can check and  
11 speak. It's Molly Sellner, Council of Senior Centers  
12 and Services of New York City, Inc.

13 UNDER SECRETARY WATKINS: We were skipping  
14 all over the place.

15 MOLLY SELLNER: Okay, well, I have to go. I  
16 just wanted to know if I could speak.

17 UNDER SECRETARY WATKINS: All right. And  
18 then it's Bill Ayres.

19 MOLLY SELLNER: Thank you. I appreciate it.

20 My name is Molly Sellner from the Council of  
21 Senior Centers and Services in New York City. We are  
22 a central organization in New York City representing  
23 over 300,000 seniors in senior centers. I am going to  
24 speak today about an issue that hasn't really been  
25 tested at length here and that's the effects food





1 stamps have on elderly immigrants specifically.

2           These are the critical times for the  
3 elderly. A New York City Coalition Against Hunger  
4 found that the total number of people turned away from  
5 soup kitchens in New York City in January of 1999,  
6 8,000. That's 11 percent of seniors. And an increase  
7 of 1200 from the previous year. In addition, an  
8 October 17, 1999 Daily News article reported that one  
9 in ten seniors is turned away each month from soup  
10 kitchens and food pantries. Also there is a waiting  
11 list for the Meals On Wheels program and a New York  
12 State study reported that 70 percent of those eligible  
13 for Meals On Wheels are not receiving them.

14           A little bit of demographics about  
15 specifically the elderly in New York State. New York  
16 State Office of the Aging in the 1997 United States  
17 Census projections recited the elderly population in  
18 New York State would nearly double from 1999 to 2010.  
19 It will be from 3.2 million people who are over age 60  
20 to 6.5 million. The population of older New Yorkers  
21 85 and older is going to increase as well, almost  
22 double. Yet many of these elderly will continue to  
23 struggle to make ends meet.

24           In New York City the study entitled Growing  
25 Older in New York in the 1990s, 20 percent of all



1 elderly in New York City are living at or below the  
2 official poverty rate. Moreover, the latest available  
3 census figures for New York State found that over 25  
4 percent of these elderly living in households live by  
5 themselves and many of them are women. The numbers  
6 shown over the past decade are that people are living  
7 longer.

8 In New York City the number of minority  
9 elderly are equally disturbing. Median income among  
10 African American elderly and Latino elderly was only  
11 \$7,251 per year.

12 Finally, there are 100,000 immigrants  
13 arriving in New York City annually which adds to the  
14 already large immigrant population. Many have a very  
15 difficult time understanding English and accessing  
16 benefits. This is particularly true for the elderly  
17 immigrant population.

18 As a result of these statistics and  
19 increasing amount of older New Yorkers will rely on  
20 food stamps to be able to eat. Without such benefits  
21 many will become malnourished which leads to increased  
22 health problems. According to a nutrition screening  
23 initiative report in 1996, for every dollar invested  
24 in nutrition program, \$3.25 is saved in health care  
25 costs. The alternative is far worse. The cost of



1       treating malnourished hospital patients was four times  
2       greater than the cost and the care of malnourished  
3       patients. Currently 25 percent of 728,000 seniors are  
4       at nutritional risk in New York State according to the  
5       1995 Elderly Nutrition Survey. As for food stamp  
6       participation, many elderly New Yorkers who meet  
7       income guidelines do not receive them. Only 17.8  
8       percent of seniors living outside New York City  
9       participate in the Food Stamp Program which are more  
10      eligible. That's 58,000 out of a possible 329,000  
11      seniors outside New York City who are eligible for  
12      food stamps don't access them. That's low compared to  
13      the national rate of 35 percent, stemming from the  
14      1990 USDA survey.

15               Actually, participation rates in New York  
16      City, we are not able to get the results because the  
17      Human Resources Administration hasn't been able to  
18      give us the information.

19               While we believe the administrators of the  
20      Food Stamp Program are committed to ending hunger and  
21      food security, understanding the link good nutrition  
22      has to staying healthy and knowing the importance of  
23      choosing your own food in light of participants'  
24      diverse cultures, the Council of Senior Centers and  
25      Services provided a few recommendations:



1                   One, we urge of the passing of the Hunger  
2                   Relief Act and fairness for legal immigrants.

3                   The big issue for the elderly is that there  
4                   was a restoration but it did not restore food stamps  
5                   to legal immigrants who are now age 60 to 69. They  
6                   only restored those who turned 65 in 1996. There is  
7                   this growing number of seniors every year gets larger  
8                   and larger and there is no restoration. We are going  
9                   to have 80 and 90 year old people unable to get food  
10                  stamps.

11                  Secondly we ask that the food stamp SSI link  
12                  that is being asked through negotiations with the USDA  
13                  and New York State get a waiver to supply food stamps  
14                  to SSI recipients living alone. We're asking that  
15                  type of program be expanded nationally. As we stated  
16                  25 percent of New Yorkers live alone.

17                  Third, outreach. I can't say it enough. So  
18                  many people don't think they are eligible, don't think  
19                  they qualify, don't know anything about the Food Stamp  
20                  Program.

21                  A USDA study found that nearly 12 percent --  
22                  and this is probably a low number -- the elderly  
23                  non-participants had never heard of the program and  
24                  one-third believe they are ineligible without even  
25                  inquiring. Some of you believe that they were





1 categorically ineligible because they were elderly.  
2 We're asking that the USDA fund public service  
3 announcements and advertize to increase the percentage  
4 of eligible seniors receiving food stamps. It's too  
5 low at 17 percent.

6 Number four, stigma. As we said before many  
7 will not participate because they are embarrassed, the  
8 sense of hurt pride. We need to destigmatize the  
9 program and change the name.

10 Fifth, access. I won't get into language  
11 access. It was mentioned right before me. Many  
12 people are unable to have successful access because  
13 they simply can't speak English.

14 Physical access. For seniors applying for  
15 food stamps who either can't get adequate  
16 transportation or help and have disabilities we  
17 recommend eliminating the face-to-face interview  
18 requirement specifically for those age 60 and over,  
19 especially for recertification.

20 The process. The application and  
21 recertification process is time consuming, onerous,  
22 complex, lengthy and it hinders people, particularly  
23 elderly from applying for food stamps to keep from  
24 going hungry. It's all in my notes I will submit.

25 Specifically on the proposed food stamp



1 regulations in terms of access, the interim guidance  
2 that is supposedly covered by the Department of  
3 Justice provided interim guidance on verification of  
4 citizenship and allows for those who cannot find  
5 documents whether from years and years ago of moving,  
6 cognitive reasons, you can self test. You can sign  
7 and swear under penalty of perjury that you are a  
8 citizen and you are qualified to receive food stamps.  
9 In addition, you can get a third party to declare you  
10 are a citizen. That is in theory in fault but in  
11 practice it's not being used currently by the  
12 Department of Health right now and they do not accept  
13 that as a way to show you are qualified. So many  
14 elderly have to wait six to eight months, they are  
15 dieing for the benefit.

16 Lastly I will say food stamps as a health  
17 program, as noted earlier, there is a clear link  
18 between good nutrition and staying healthy, therefore  
19 the Food Stamp Program should be reframed as a health  
20 program. This not only would help destigmatize it,  
21 but also would add an important dimension to eliminate  
22 hunger.

23 Thank you for your opportunity. I apologize  
24 for cutting in.

25 UNDER SECRETARY WATKINS: Thank you.



1 Bill Ayres.

2 BILL AYRES: My name is Bill Ayres. I am  
3 the director of World Hunger Year here in New York.  
4 There has been so many wonderful ideas here that I  
5 want to just say that I agree with all of them and  
6 that's not the problem. We have lots of good ideas on  
7 how to fix the Food Stamp Program. You have lots of  
8 good ideas. That's just not the problem. It really  
9 is a question of attitude, I believe and I would like  
10 to start with a little story.

11 About a month ago I was speaking at a  
12 conference down in Florida with a couple of your  
13 colleagues, with Virgil, Conrad and Steve Carlson and  
14 a bunch of other people and the title of the  
15 conference was "Everyone at the Table." And I thought  
16 it was a very good image. And there was a line that  
17 kept going through my head afterwards in a song. And  
18 it said there's room for everyone at the table in  
19 America. But, in fact, there isn't right now. And  
20 there ought to be. And while I was at that conference  
21 I heard a story. A fellow told me a story about a  
22 woman who had been giving her food to her children and  
23 she wasn't eating properly. And after doing this for  
24 quite a while, she got very sick. They took her to  
25 the doctor and the doctor said "Two more days and you



1       would have died. You have malnutrition." That's a  
2       shocking thing to hear in our country, but everyone in  
3       this room probably knows a woman like that or a man  
4       like that who have given their food to their kids  
5       because there wasn't enough to feed everyone. Now,  
6       why is that in a country that is doing so well  
7       financially, in a country that has thousands of soup  
8       kitchens and food pantries, in a country that has food  
9       stamps and child nutrition programs and still we are  
10      told that we have 31 million people in this country  
11      who are either hungry at some time during the month or  
12      they are food insecure and they don't know where their  
13      next meal is coming from. And I would say to you that  
14      it is a question of attitude that needs to be changed,  
15      starting right with the Food Stamp Program.

16               For example, there is a whole group of  
17      people who are not being served by the Food Stamp  
18      Program and that woman undoubtedly fit into it. One  
19      of those groups of people are working poor people.  
20      Folks who have moved from welfare to work and the 60  
21      percent of them that get jobs, they are only making in  
22      the median average -- the median salary is \$6.61 an  
23      hour. That's not a lot of money. You can't feed a  
24      family on that. So it may very well be that that  
25      woman fit into that category. And I would say to you





1 as the folks to who administer this program there is a  
2 growth opportunity for you. Anybody who runs a  
3 business is always looking for growth opportunities.  
4 There is a growth opportunity right there. This is a  
5 whole group of people, working poor people, who need  
6 to be in the Food Stamp Program and they are not.

7           There is a second group of people and that  
8 is folks who don't qualify for TANF or maybe they do  
9 qualify and they have been told they don't qualify.  
10 But, in any case, they still do qualify for food  
11 stamps, but they are told that they don't qualify for  
12 food stamps or they at least believe that. And you  
13 have heard over and over and over again today people  
14 saying that we need to have four different things.  
15 One is outreach. The second one is accessibility.  
16 The third one is simplification. And I am not going  
17 to talk about those anymore because everybody said  
18 that and have come up with tons of good ideas on how  
19 to do that. But the fourth one is attitude. And as I  
20 have sat here and listened today, the sense that I  
21 get, and I have done this myself, so I know, I have  
22 gone into welfare offices and I know how people are  
23 treated. And it's like you are in a different  
24 country. Somehow or another -- a woman was saying  
25 here before that somehow you have just stumbled into



1       the wrong country, you're not in the United States of  
2       America where we have freedom anymore and people are  
3       supposed to be treated with dignity. We are being  
4       treated like dirt. Now, does that mean that all of  
5       those workers in there are terrible people. I don't  
6       think so at all. I think that the problem is attitude  
7       that comes from the top and it isn't coming from you  
8       folks because I know the two of you. I know the three  
9       of you and you are wonderful people. You really  
10      believe that these programs ought to be serving  
11      people. But somehow or another, the attitude has not  
12      been conveyed properly coming from the Congress and  
13      then going into the states and the way that these  
14      programs are administered and certainly not here in  
15      New York City. The attitude is it that the folks who  
16      get food stamps are a bunch of lazy bums. That's  
17      still the attitude. That was never the case. But the  
18      truth of the matter is now the vast majority of the  
19      people who get food stamps are people who are working,  
20      are people who are struggling and gradually the image  
21      is changing, even in the media.

22                   We do a program called the Harry Chapin  
23      (phonetic) Media Awards and we read tons and tons of  
24      newspaper articles and magazines. We look at radio  
25      shows and what we have seen in the past few years is



1       that the media is not trashing food stamp folks  
2       anymore. As a matter of fact we are starting to get  
3       the opposite effect. There is a story about this  
4       heroic woman who is trying to make it. There is this  
5       story about this heroic couple who are working poor  
6       people and they are trying to make it and they are  
7       getting food stamps. People now see food stamps as an  
8       asset, as something that these folks should be getting  
9       because, in fact, they are working really hard and  
10      they are trying. But I don't think that the mentality  
11      of Congress has caught up with that. I don't think  
12      the mentality of a lot of the folks who are running  
13      programs in various areas have caught up with that.  
14      You have caught up with that and you are trying to  
15      change that. That's the only way it's going to  
16      change. When we change the name of the program, first  
17      of all.

18               The first thing that you said, Shirley, was  
19      right on target: Food stamps is not a welfare program.  
20      Food stamps is a nutrition assistance program. Well,  
21      maybe we ought to change the name of it to that  
22      because that is in fact it is. And once it's seen as  
23      that, as a positive thing like Social Security, like  
24      Medicare, that's where it ought to be in the  
25      consciousness of people because that's what it is. We



1       don't want to have a hungry America. So there is a  
2       tremendous growth opportunity here with those folks  
3       and also with seniors who are also too ashamed to get  
4       their \$10 and \$20. We could fix that by probably  
5       connecting the thing probably to Social Security and  
6       adding the benefit right onto the Social Security  
7       check for seniors.

8               There is all kinds of great ideas that are  
9       out there but it's never going to change until the  
10      attitude changes and the attitude has to be this is a  
11      program that people are worthy of. This is a program  
12      that is making a difference. This is not a work  
13      program. This is the nutrition program and every  
14      American deserves to have that.

15             Thank you.

16             UNDER SECRETARY WATKINS: Thank you.

17             Betty Cohen:

18             BETTY COHEN: Hi. I am Bette Cohen and I am  
19      here from City Harvest. Julia Erickson, our executive  
20      director apologizes for not being able to speak as  
21      well. She had to leave a little bit earlier. She had  
22      a prior engagement.

23             As most of you know City Harvest is a food  
24      rescue program and in New York City we help feed  
25      approximately 120,000 New Yorkers every single week.





1 City Harvest operates the Hunger Hotline and the  
2 Hunger Hotline basically matches hungry people in New  
3 York City by their Zip Code when they call in with  
4 emergency food programs directly in their  
5 neighborhood.

6 I wanted to give you some information about  
7 the Hunger Hotline and our statistics. We have been  
8 getting about 2,000 plus callers a month and I just  
9 wanted to add to that that the Hunger Hotline number  
10 has changed but we have problems with the phone  
11 company switching the number over so even though that  
12 2,000 plus is there, many people didn't know about the  
13 change in the Hunger Hotline phone number. The  
14 average family size is three and half of the callers  
15 are first-time callers. Most of the calls come in the  
16 end of the month when callers say their food stamps  
17 run out. Ninety-nine percent of the callers have  
18 homes. Very often people think City Harvest feeds  
19 foods homeless. City Harvest feeds the hungry.

20 The main reason for calling in for emergency  
21 food assistance is insufficient income. There has  
22 been a significant decrease in the number of callers  
23 who have food stamps. They were about 70 percent of  
24 the callers in 1995 had food stamps. In the past year  
25 only about 50 percent of the callers in need had food



1 stamps. And we have been finding that the majority of  
2 the callers are working people.

3 City Harvest also writes Diets and Dollars  
4 which is a food, nutrition and shopping newsletter.  
5 I have been writing Diets and Dollars now for three  
6 years. Throughout the year we publish through HRA a  
7 comparative price list. We go to the eight poorest  
8 evident neighborhoods in New York City and publish the  
9 cost of about 40 items that are sold in about eight to  
10 twelve different supermarkets in the neighborhood.  
11 On the average, I will get about 20 calls within the  
12 first week that that list is published asking me where  
13 they can go in their neighborhood to get those foods  
14 at those prices.

15 Because of all of these calls, we did a  
16 survey over the past two years of access to food in  
17 those neighbors. What was found was that there are  
18 really no regional and national supermarket chains in  
19 these eight poorest neighborhoods in New York City so  
20 that people living in these neighborhoods need to shop  
21 or only are able to shop at local food chains or as we  
22 call them smaller chains or neighbor bodegas.

23 At those local chains the average price of  
24 the market basket that we were looking at was usually  
25 40 percent higher. When people were shopping at their



1 local bodegas, it was more than 150 percent higher  
2 than if they were to shop at a regional or national  
3 chain. These are the very people that need food  
4 stamps and it shows how the allotment needs to be  
5 higher. They simply cannot afford to buy enough food  
6 on the present allotment and if you add into that the  
7 fact that their food prices are so much higher than in  
8 other neighborhoods.

9 The second thing that I would like to  
10 mention is that recently I had to give a seminar to  
11 recently retired women that had worked in the garment  
12 industry. I talked to them about applying for food  
13 stamps and they were appalled and indignant. When we  
14 went over their income, they did not have enough money  
15 to pay their rent, to pay their mortgage and now their  
16 new heating costs are anticipated to be much higher  
17 with the coming winter. When I asked them why they  
18 wouldn't apply for food stamps, their response was, we  
19 worked all of our life. We should not have to apply  
20 for welfare.

21 City Harvest makes certain recommendations  
22 for changes in the Food Stamp Program:

23 We recommend that we create a food stamp  
24 system based on greatest good, not to eliminate any  
25 possible abuse. To make the Food Stamp Program a true



1        nutrition program based on food as a basic human need  
2        and for the basis for healthy development in life.

3                So many studies have been published over the  
4        past year, the Tuft study, showing that adequate food  
5        is necessary for human brain development. If we're  
6        concerned about our children's performance in school,  
7        we need to make sure that they are adequately fed.

8                We need to move this administration from the  
9        welfare system as so many others here have already  
10       eloquently said and treat it as a public health issue.

11               We need to remove work requirements. We can  
12       no longer think about taking food away and using food  
13       as a weapon or a punishment. It's simply inhumane.  
14       We need to educate food service workers and the people  
15       that are working in the Food Stamp administration  
16       about the importance of the relationship between food,  
17       health and nutrition.

18               We need to increase the eligibility levels  
19       based on differences in regional cost of living,  
20       salary, housing and other costs so that people can eat  
21       according to the USDA's dietary guidelines.

22               We need to use non-profit and  
23       non-stigmatized community sites to enroll and educate  
24       people, especially during after work hours. We need  
25       to enroll all eligible people. As others had said, we





1       need to link enrollment in food service through WIC,  
2       especially School Lunch Program, Child Health Plus.  
3       We already have these programs and the administration  
4       of these programs working. Why not piggyback onto  
5       them.

6               We need to commission research on how  
7       nutrition is related to school performance, crime  
8       levels, health consequences and the social and  
9       financial cost of poor nutrition so when Congress asks  
10      us for statistics, we have those statistics ready.

11             We need to give benefits according to  
12      age/health status. One size does not fit all when it  
13      comes to food stamps. And one of the things that we  
14      find very important at City Harvest, we need to  
15      incorporate food safety education into the program,  
16      especially targeting families with children and the  
17      elderly.

18             One of the things that I found whenever I go  
19      to meetings like this is that we tend to preach to the  
20      already converted or to the choir. And I feel that  
21      you as members of the USDA and Under Secretary  
22      Watkins, you are part of your choir. You are already  
23      on our side. So I ask you if you will take this  
24      message to Congress and tell them what we have said.

25             Thank you.



1 UNDER SECRETARY WATKINS: Thank you.

2 Carol Parker-Duncanson.

3 CAROL PARKER-DUNCANSON: Good evening. I'm  
4 Carol Parker-Duncanson. I'm the regional coordinator  
5 for the Cornell Co-op Extension, a community-based  
6 nutrition education program and I am here reporting  
7 from the discussions that I've had (inaudible). And  
8 we both have over 15 years experience in community  
9 nutrition education in New York City and we would  
10 certainly like to commend the Under Secretary Watkins  
11 for her interest in obtaining feedback relative to  
12 improving the Food Stamp Program.

13 The following perspectives that I'm sharing  
14 are based on interactions with our staff who are  
15 community educators working in many communities in New  
16 York City and program administrators that we work with  
17 a community based organizations and senior centers in  
18 low income communities and through direct contact with  
19 food stamp eligible individuals in neighborhoods and  
20 communities in which we work.

21 We have identified two major issues that  
22 were talked about before. I just felt that I had to  
23 stay and say them because saying them over and over  
24 again would probably re-enforce the importance of  
25 them.



1           There are two major issues that we have that  
2           we really want to address in terms of the impact on  
3           food stamp enrollment in the communities in which we  
4           work. One certainly is population to be served and  
5           the other is stigma. These issues have often emerged  
6           as some of the factors by specific groups who apply to  
7           participate in the Food Stamp Program. In terms of  
8           population, immigration status, many of the legal  
9           residents holding green cards are very confused about  
10          the implication of the 1996 legislation. They are  
11          afraid of not being eligible to become U.S. citizens  
12          if they apply for food stamps or the implication that  
13          receiving food stamps may affect their immigrant  
14          status. And this is a real and honest fear.

15                 It is important to remember that the media  
16                 conducted a massive campaign to publicize the 1996  
17                 legislation that affected that and everybody knew what  
18                 was going to be happening. It created fear and a mass  
19                 exodus. A lot of things happened as a result of that  
20                 media campaign and the publicity that accompanied it.  
21                 That affected a lot of people and they reacted in  
22                 terms of their fear.

23                 Although changes have occurred in terms of  
24                 eligibility criteria, as they relate to various  
25                 population groups, it appears that very little



1       systematic effort was made to outreach to these groups  
2       and provide them with the new information. So many  
3       immigrants who are eligible and entitled to food  
4       stamps under some of these special situations do not  
5       apply again because of their misconception about  
6       eligibility and their fear and, again, thinking of  
7       their linkage toward immigration status.

8               Seniors are another major population group  
9       that we have found that in many cases seniors do not  
10      apply, again, because of lack of information. They  
11      are not aware of program benefits and the different  
12      eligibility criteria. They did not know that they are  
13      entitled and in many cases eligible. The stigma,  
14      again, associated with benefits, the language barrier,  
15      traveling difficulties, ability to access are some of  
16      the things that affect seniors, and the perception,  
17      again, of why do all of this for \$10 worth of  
18      benefits.

19             In addition, the majority of the community  
20      outreach programs focus on providing information on  
21      how to apply for food stamps in some instances. They  
22      do not provide information about changes in food stamp  
23      legislation and how it relates to groups and  
24      populations like the ones that I have mentioned above.

25             The other feature is the stigma. It is





1       based on the experience certainly of our participants  
2       and many people who we talk to on a regular basis.  
3       This association, of course, has been based on the  
4       fact that welfare and food stamps have always been  
5       closely associated and those applications for food  
6       stamps were usually distributed and processed at  
7       welfare offices. And this is still in place. So the  
8       continued stigma attached to the whole notion of  
9       welfare is something that a people are really bothered  
10      by. We recommend that this is based on our years of  
11      experience. (Inaudible.)

12               We really consider an effective marketing  
13      program that promotes the program in a different  
14      context. To make the program benefit be related to  
15      food nutrition, health and resources rather than a  
16      social entitlement. And definitely consider a name  
17      change.

18               We also recommend a promotion campaign.  
19      Again, this has been mentioned before, similar to the  
20      models used with Child Health Plus and with Medicare  
21      to include extensive promotion including local and  
22      ethnically diverse outlets. (Inaudible).

23               UNDER SECRETARY WATKINS:    Thank you. I  
24      would remind you again to make your comments brief and  
25      then provide your written comments for the record.



1                   EVELYN JONES-RICH: My name is Evelyn  
2                   Jones-Rich and I am the national secretary of  
3                   Americans for Democratic Action. I am a child of the  
4                   Depression, no matter how I look. I know what it is  
5                   to be hungry. I know what it is to eat oatmeal for  
6                   breakfast, for lunch and for dinner day after day.  
7                   And that's why I insisted that I present this  
8                   testimony. I have been here this afternoon and I have  
9                   listened to service providers talk about their  
10                  clients. I'm one of the clients who has made that  
11                  long transition from hunger to perhaps the middle  
12                  class, and in that process, I think I have something  
13                  to say about the Food Stamp Program which adds to the  
14                  conversation.

15                 ADA is a national political group organized  
16                 more than 53 years ago, younger than I, by famous  
17                 people like Eleanor Roosevelt and Hubert Humphrey.  
18                 None of them went hungry and none of them knew what it  
19                 was to wonder where the next meal would come from or  
20                 suffer the pain of going to sleep at night with  
21                 nothing to eat. And one of the reasons why I have  
22                 been so influential inside this national organization  
23                 is because I have kept them in touch with reality and  
24                 they know through constant reminders that among the  
25                 many programs which our government sponsors, the Food



1 Stamp Program is a good program. So I'm here like  
2 some people to say, yes, the beginning has been good,  
3 but there is still much work to do. And I associate  
4 myself with the comments made by in some instances  
5 former students who talk about receiving public  
6 assistance and benefiting from food stamps and having  
7 to suffer the indignities of service providers who  
8 themselves were never hungry.

9 Let me make three points which I think will  
10 add to that conversation. First off, ADA supports  
11 legislation which favors in the long run the ordinary  
12 citizen in his or her home because we believe it's the  
13 role of government to help people. In that  
14 connection, we support the Kennedy Spector Walsh  
15 Hunger Relief Act which my friend Bill Ayres referred  
16 to earlier.

17 We believe there should be access to  
18 benefits for families of legal immigrants and that  
19 allotments for families with high shelter costs should  
20 be increased.

21 There is another piece of legislation we  
22 support. It's called the Graham Cohen Levin Food  
23 Stamp Outreach and Research for Kids Act and it would  
24 fund outreach efforts to insure that those who are  
25 eligible for benefits are properly informed and



1       enabled.

2               Now, we have some specific recommendations  
3       to make which I think add to those made by others  
4       during the course of this long conversation. We would  
5       like to add eligibility for pregnant undocumented  
6       immigrants. We believe that even though these women  
7       are undocumented, the youngsters they deliver will be  
8       American citizens, and as such, we are responsible for  
9       them. Low birth rate babies really present a burden  
10      to our health care system and we can avoid that by  
11      making these women eligible for food stamps.

12             Secondly, we think that we should strengthen  
13      education and outreach so that all eligible families  
14      receive food stamps that the law allows. There are  
15      families eligible for food stamps and they have been  
16      referred to during this conversation who for many  
17      reasons are unaware of their eligibility. Part of  
18      that is because of the attitude, again, a reference to  
19      my friend Bill Ayres, of hostile state bureaucrats who  
20      delay, divert and discourage the use of food stamps by  
21      people who are eligible to use them. And we believe  
22      in ADA that much of the decline and the use of food  
23      stamps is not because people are getting out of  
24      poverty, but because the requirements for establishing  
25      eligibility are so difficult and burdensome.





1                   We believe that we should remove the cap on  
2                   allowable shelter expenses for families with children  
3                   to reflect the real cost of living particularly in  
4                   inner cities.

5                   I wanted to mention about the automobiles  
6                   but others have done that for persons living in areas  
7                   which do not have access to public transportation.

8                   And finally, we think that we need to resist  
9                   privatization which would divert funds from the hungry  
10                  to entrepreneurs.

11                  I want to conclude by saying that I am in my  
12                  old age a retired educator. During the time I was a  
13                  teacher, a high school principal, a college dean, it  
14                  was my opportunity to serve youngsters in the New York  
15                  City public school system who were eligible for free  
16                  and reduced lunch. Many of these youngsters were in  
17                  families also eligible for food stamps. I served in  
18                  schools which had been termed the "low performing  
19                  schools." It was my experience again and again to  
20                  note that every time we were able to provide free  
21                  breakfast and free lunch consistent with USDA  
22                  guidelines, we were able significantly to increase  
23                  academic outcomes. There is a clear relationship  
24                  between the performance of students in classrooms and  
25                  their access to nutritious food.



1                   Let me conclude, therefore, by saying that  
2           what is at stake is not simply an individual's access  
3           to nutritious food, but rather a service and an  
4           appreciation that our nation cannot survive in the  
5           21st Century unless we see to it that every resident  
6           in this country has access to health and nutritious  
7           food.

8                   Thank you very much.

9                   UNDER SECRETARY WATKINS:   Thank you.

10                  SPEAKER FOR CHRISTINA YARAVINSKI (PHONETIC):  
11           Christina Yaravinski is a food stamp recipient and she  
12           has two full-time jobs that she loves very much.  
13           Michael and Thomas, if you would like to look at their  
14           pictures -- she's a working mother.

15                  Quickly Christina's experience:   She is a  
16           survivor of domestic violence and after leaving the  
17           abuse of her husband she then experienced the abuse of  
18           both the welfare office and the food stamp office.  
19           She was given misinformation about what benefits she  
20           was able to apply for and she was asked repeatedly why  
21           didn't you stay with your husband and she was also  
22           told that she was not able to get housing assistance  
23           because that's only for women who are recently abused  
24           by their husband.   That's been her daily life, having  
25           to deal with this.   After the first time she went to



1 the food stamp office after not going back to the  
2 welfare office because they said if she received child  
3 support she could not get cash assistance, so her only  
4 option to get food was to go to the food stamp office.  
5 She went there and watched employees at the food stamp  
6 office eat their lunch in front of her and her hungry  
7 children. Her son asked her, "Mommy, had why isn't  
8 she sharing her food with me?" When she left the  
9 office she walked two blocks away and threw up.  
10 That's her experience and she has been experiencing  
11 this for the past year.

12 So my one recommendation to you is that like  
13 me, think about Christina and her kids, Michael and  
14 Thomas before you go to bed every night and you wake  
15 up in the morning and look in the mirror and more  
16 importantly when you go around the country and you  
17 listen to what these recommendations are and you think  
18 about her. We can give you facts. We can give you  
19 statistics. We can tell you about food stamp  
20 reliance. We can tell you about inadequate food and  
21 food pantry kitchens but the reality is that people  
22 every day are experiencing this. And you must be  
23 motivated by these experiences of the people who  
24 actually experience these horrendous policies.

25 And I know that you are on our team. And



1       you are all that we have to go to Congress and to go  
2       to D.C. and to fight with our mayor and Jason Turner  
3       to say that enough is enough.

4               UNDER SECRETARY WATKINS: Thank you.

5               Pamela Darby.

6               PAMELA DARBY: Hello. My name is Pam Darby  
7       and I am a nutritionist with the New York Childrens  
8       Health Project, a program of the Division of Community  
9       Pediatrics at Montefiore Medical Center which delivers  
10      comprehensive health care services to homeless  
11      children and their parents throughout the medical  
12      units and on-site clinics and homeless shelters across  
13      New York City.

14              I appreciate the opportunity to highlight  
15      some of the most critical issues facing homeless  
16      families with regards to nutrition.

17              Homeless children and their families are at  
18      risk for many nutritional problems. Many children I  
19      see are diagnosed with (inaudible). Basically that  
20      means they are not growing, obesity and have other  
21      nutritional deficits. For these families food stamps  
22      are a wonderful program and really serve as a safety  
23      net which helps insure the nutritional status of these  
24      children.

25              As families are moved from housed to





1 homeless and enter the New York City shelter system,  
2 many times they are moved from shelter to shelter and  
3 even once they get situated within a shelter and the  
4 shelter themselves report the appropriate change of  
5 address to the center, many families do not receive  
6 their notices of appointments and only find out their  
7 benefits including food stamps have been cut when they  
8 attempt to purchase food or obtain cash. Families are  
9 not given expedited food stamps and many times they  
10 wait months to receive benefits.

11 (Inaudible).

12 UNDER SECRETARY WATKINS: William Mordenti.

13 WILLIAM MORDENTI: To keep it short so get  
14 right to the point, what is happening to our foods is  
15 that they are filled with chemicals and pesticides and  
16 deadly DDT. And supposedly they are banned here in  
17 the USA, but happens is our industrial CEOs ship it  
18 out for profit to foreign countries. It's put in our  
19 foods and fruits and vegetables that comes back here  
20 in our supermarkets. Thirty-three percent of the  
21 foods in our supermarkets contain poisonous, deadly  
22 DDT. That information has been told and given to you  
23 folks over there. So let's do something about our  
24 families, your families and most of all, our children.  
25 Who is held accountable for that? Nobody.



1       You want me to name one of the guys who should be held  
2       accountable and should be put into world courts? His  
3       name is Shapiro of Monsanto who is genociding our  
4       food. It's not just generics. It's totally  
5       experimental. You understand what I am talking about  
6       because I see you smiling. You know what's going on.  
7       How do we stop it? Again, they have got to go on  
8       trial into prison. I ask you to take a look at Ralph  
9       Nader's Multi-national Monitor Magazine in the Fall of  
10      '99. There are 100 worse criminalities published in  
11      that magazine. What happens to these guys? They are  
12      not like you and me who go to jail or get executed or  
13      hanged or gassed to death. All they do is pay fines.  
14      Let's get something real happening here whether its  
15      our food, our environment, our social structure, our  
16      politics. Let's get something real happening here  
17      because we are crazy.

18                   UNDER SECRETARY WATKINS: Thank you.

19                   Scott McBride.

20                   HWAN-HUI HELEN LEE: (Inaudible).

21                   MARIA LEMONS: Good evening. My name is  
22      Maria Lemons and I am with the group called  
23      Grandmother's As Mother's Again. I am from the  
24      Brooklyn Coalition.

25                   I am here because as a grandmother raising



1        grandchildren a lot of us do have problems with HRA.  
2        Food stamps is one of the problems that we have and  
3        the treatment that we receive when we go into the HRA  
4        centers, their attitude. We become frustrated,  
5        aggravated, hurt. We are treated like nothing and  
6        told that, well, if we're taking care of our  
7        grandchildren, that's what we're supposed to do.

8                    I receive Social Security. When I got a  
9        slight increase in my Social Security, they cut the  
10       children's food stamps to \$18. I told them that I had  
11       medical needs. They told me that was my problem. I  
12       cut my medicine in half and wound up having to go into  
13       the hospital because I have sugar diabetes and I had  
14       to be in the hospital five days because I shouldn't  
15       have cut my medication down. I cut my medication down  
16       because I had to save money to feed my grandchildren.

17                   I was just informed that they are to take my  
18       medical needs into consideration. Also I have dietary  
19       needs that's different from them. That should be  
20       considered, but it hasn't been. A lot of us  
21       grandparents raising our grandchildren have many  
22       problems. There is one great grandmother taking care  
23       of her great grandchildren. At first she was getting  
24       \$300 a month for nine grandchildren, but when they  
25       found out that she owned the home she lived in, she



1        was told that she could get nothing. Nine  
2        grandchildren. They don't take into consideration now  
3        the water that she is going to use for these children,  
4        the electricity, the food, the gas, the soap. All of  
5        these things are not taken into consideration. And  
6        when you do, if you do go down to apply or ask  
7        somebody to ask her for help, you are treated like  
8        garbage. I have been in the place where a worker is  
9        sitting there at 10:00 in the morning and eating out  
10       of a tupperware bowl while we're there asking for food  
11       stamps. Emergency food stamps someone asked for and  
12       they were told -- they applied on a Wednesday. They  
13       went to the office on the Friday and was told, well,  
14       if it's not in the computer tomorrow you will get it  
15       Monday. If you are in an emergency you have to wait  
16       five to seven days for emergency food stamps. We're  
17       about being abused by this system that's supposed to  
18       help protect us and feed those children.

19                Like I said, instead of getting my  
20       medication I had to take and buy food because I  
21       couldn't see them starve. There is a lot of  
22       grandparents that's working and they do need maybe  
23       some assistance. But if you go to these places, like  
24       I said, it's not only that you go there and you are  
25       humiliated, you can go there at 9:00 in the morning





1       and do not get out of there until 3:00 or 4:00 and  
2       still do not get any assistance.

3               UNDER SECRETARY WATKINS: Thank you very  
4       much, Maria. We could like to get your comments in  
5       writing. Thank you.

6               Linda Brown.

7               LINDA BROWN: My name is Linda Brown. I'm a  
8       grandma and a mama, a former welfare recipient, food  
9       stamps, a child that was grown up on food stamps. I  
10      remember when food stamps first started and you had to  
11      pay to get food stamps. Thank God you don't got to do  
12      that now. But they ain't doing nothing for them now.  
13      Ten dollars a month when your income is \$535 a month,  
14      you got two teenage children who are trying to go to  
15      college and paying their own way and your rent is \$267  
16      a month, ain't making it. Okay. And on top of that  
17      for that \$10, every three months you got to go and  
18      give them the same papers they got last month, the  
19      month before that. In fact, I think 135th Street  
20      welfare office has more birth certificates on me and  
21      my kids than I will ever have. Not only birth  
22      certificates, school records, Medicaid cards. I am  
23      telling you, this is crazy. It's totally crazy for  
24      \$10 a month. No wonder no one goes there. You got to  
25      take an entire shopping cart full with papers because



1       the one paper that they tell you not to bring is the  
2       one paper they gone make you go home and get. I done  
3       got smart. I photocopy everything I give them. And  
4       when they take me and tell me they are cutting me off  
5       or something, I tell me okay, I am going to go  
6       directly to the politician and say call Albany and get  
7       me a fair hearing because if you use the telephone  
8       number on the paper they give you, you will never get  
9       nothing done. Never. Because the telephone number  
10      don't work. Either that or they done disconnected it.  
11      They done lifted up the handle of the phone so that it  
12      stays busy all day. And I know my two minutes is  
13      almost up. And I know y'all done heard this before,  
14      but please, repeat it back into Washington because I'm  
15      get tired of going there telling them the same thing.

16                   UNDER SECRETARY WATKINS: Doreen Wohl.

17                   DOREEN WOHL: My name is Doreen Wohl and I  
18      am the director of the West Side Campaign Against  
19      Hunger. We are the largest food pantry in New York  
20      City and I will keep it very brief. I have to tell  
21      you that the number of people that we provide food to  
22      has tripled since 1994. All of the people who come to  
23      the food pantry are poor. And by poor I mean an  
24      income of \$12,000 a year is a high income, none of  
25      this \$40,000 from Connecticut or Cape Cod. We're



1 talking about really low income, \$4,000, \$5,000.

2 Forty-nine percent of the people who come to  
3 the food pantry for emergency food are not getting  
4 food stamps. They are not getting food stamps at all  
5 and they are, all of them, eligible. I have a number  
6 of examples of people who we have seen in the last  
7 couple of days whose food stamps have been cut. I  
8 will give you just one. A family of four; it's a  
9 mother, a father and two sons; a 20 year old who is a  
10 Hunter College student and a seven year old. The  
11 father has a spinal injury and cannot work and he is  
12 applying for disability but he doesn't have it right  
13 now and the mother doesn't work. They are receiving  
14 welfare for only three people because of the Hunter  
15 College student and their food stamps of \$285 were cut  
16 in May and she has been denied a fair hearing. This  
17 is just one of the many examples of what is happening  
18 to people who then come to emergency food. Emergency  
19 food is not better than food stamps. It's a backup.  
20 Food stamps are what people should be getting.

21 Thank you.

22 UNDER SECRETARY WATKINS: Mary Ann Geraci.

23 MARY ANN GERACI: My name is Mary Ann Geraci  
24 and I applied for assistance May 1st to prevent my  
25 eviction. It is now July 20th and I have not received



1       any help. I would have been evicted July 14th if it  
2       wasn't for a friend who loaned me the money to prevent  
3       my eviction. I have been eating through the help of  
4       my church and friends and family have been helping me  
5       with other expenses, electricity and such.

6               I want to just confirm what everyone has  
7       said about the difficulty in applying and the  
8       treatment, being degraded. I have worked since I was  
9       17 years old. I have a work related injury for the  
10      last six years I have had difficulty. I was working  
11      part-time and was fired from the job because I hurt my  
12      knee on the job and I was told not to come in with a  
13      cane because I needed a cane at the time. I still  
14      have the injury but I am trying to get along without  
15      the cane. I do want to get back to work. I am  
16      looking for a job. But one thing I want to address  
17      besides the food stamps is the importance of  
18      preventing people from becoming homeless. I would be  
19      homeless right now if it wasn't for a friend. I am a  
20      citizen of this country and I think that's atrocious.  
21      And now I understand why there are so many homeless  
22      people in this country. And for the richest country  
23      in the world, we should be ashamed of ourselves and I  
24      hope you can do something. I know this is about food  
25      stamps but I hope you can do something about helping





1 the homeless too.

2 Thank you.

3 JIM HANNAH: (Caller) (Inaudible).

4 CARLOS RODRIGUEZ: Good evening. I  
5 appreciate your hosting this conversation and the  
6 opportunity to share my experience with the Food Stamp  
7 Program. My name is Carlos Rodriguez and I work for  
8 the Community Resource Center as project director for  
9 our Food Stamp outreach screening project called Food  
10 Force.

11 Food Force is a project designed to increase  
12 poor New Yorkers' access to food stamps. In the five  
13 years that we've been around, we've provided Food  
14 Stamp Program information, outreach and application  
15 assistance materials to more than 80,000 households,  
16 and of these 80,000, over 27,000 have been provided a  
17 full computerized pre-screening and initial intake of  
18 their possible eligibility for food stamps. More than  
19 80 percent of the 27,000 have been found eligible for  
20 food stamps based on information about their  
21 household, monthly incomes and resources.

22 To accomplish this goal, Food Force keeps up  
23 with staff and volunteers of over 489 organizations in  
24 all five boroughs of New York City. In addition to  
25 these direct client services, Food Force staff conduct



1 food benefits training for emergency food program  
2 staff and volunteers with the goal of integrating  
3 benefits assistance into the basic function of  
4 community feeding programs. We provide the same  
5 service as other tax community based organizations who  
6 are interested.

7 The Food Force Project is an effective means  
8 to increase the participation in the Food Stamp  
9 Program. We provide outreach at the local level to  
10 diverse communities and neighborhoods in New York  
11 City. At the same time we empower individuals by  
12 providing them with an estimation of their potential  
13 eligibility for food stamps and with information to  
14 help them begin their enrollment process. This  
15 approach portrays a positive image of the Food Stamp  
16 Program and encourages participation.

17 We believe this model can and should be  
18 expanded locally and replicated nationwide. Despite  
19 our existing and ever-increasing number of households,  
20 our follow-up calls have high rate of many who have  
21 experienced difficulty in Obtaining food stamp  
22 benefits. In order for us to effectively increase and  
23 maintain participation in the Food Stamp Program, we  
24 must address the barriers clients face at application  
25 and throughout participation in the Food Stamp Program



1 in New York City.

2 Outreach is very important and barriers  
3 prevent the most important outreach which is word of  
4 mouth. Without experiences from the clients,  
5 successful outreach is limited.

6 UNDER SECRETARY WATKINS: Thank you very  
7 much.

8 T.Q.

9 T.Q. NGUYEN: (Inaudible).

10 UNDER SECRETARY WATKINS: Randal Jeffrey.

11 RANDAL JEFFREY: Thank you for the  
12 opportunity to participate in this conversation today.  
13 I am a staff attorney at the New York Legal Assistance  
14 Group, NYLAG which is a not-for-profit civil legal  
15 service office that provides free legal services to  
16 poor individuals throughout New York City. The full  
17 text of my statement is on the table in the back.

18 I would also like to point out that earlier  
19 this year NYLAG submitted formal comments on certain  
20 proposed Food Stamp regulations. I will not reread  
21 those comments here, but instead will focus on the  
22 issues of language barriers to the Food Stamp Program.

23 As was so effectively presented earlier by  
24 members of Make the Road by Walking and others, those  
25 who do not speak English face substantial barriers to



1       applying for and continuing to receive food stamp  
2       benefits in New York City. It is precisely because of  
3       cases such as these that NYLAG together with Make the  
4       Road by Walking and the Puerto Rican Legal Defense and  
5       Education Fund filed a Ramirez v. Giuliani lawsuit  
6       against New York State and New York City. The suit  
7       challenges the city's failure to provide interpreter  
8       services and translated materials in the  
9       administration of the Food Stamp Program.

10               While it raises a variety of claims, it is  
11       the food stamp regulations that most severely impose a  
12       duty on the state and city to provide staff and  
13       interpreters and translated materials. These  
14       regulations are particularly crucial for administering  
15       the Food Stamp Program in New York City.

16               At a time when they filed suit, the city put  
17       little emphasis on meeting the needs of non-English  
18       speaking food stamp applicants and recipients. The  
19       welfare office staff routinely told clients that they  
20       had to bring their own interpreters with them.  
21       Documents were only translated into one other  
22       language, Spanish, and not even all documents were  
23       translated into that language. The city had nothing  
24       that could be called a policy for providing services  
25       for those who could not speak English.





1           The failure of the city's welfare offices to  
2       provide interpreter services and translated materials  
3       have a serious adverse effect on the well-being of low  
4       income non-English speaking households in New York  
5       City.

6           Currently we are negotiating with the state  
7       and city in an attempt to settle our lawsuit, however  
8       the state and city still have a long way to go to  
9       become in compliance with the food stamp regulations  
10      and to guarantee equal access to the program. In this  
11      regard, the USDA should enforce and strengthen its  
12      language regulations to ensure access to the Food  
13      Stamp Program to all those who are eligible.

14           Thank you.

15           UNDER SECRETARY WATKINS: Jane Eggers.

16           JANE EGGERS: Good evening. My name is Jane  
17       Eggers. I am social work student at Columbia  
18       University and I work with Community Impact which is a  
19       non-profit organization that manages 25 community  
20       service programs serving 14,000 people each year.  
21       Community Impact's 850 student volunteers, five  
22       full-time, three part-time staff operate 25 community  
23       service programs in Morningside Heights, Washington  
24       Heights and Harlem areas.

25           Relevant to this testimony, we offer two



1 food service programs, a food pantry and a soup  
2 kitchen and an advocacy coalition which assists  
3 individuals in obtaining welfare benefits.

4 From working with these individuals we  
5 developed six suggestions which are as follows:

6 One, I suggest continued improvement on the  
7 accessibility of food stamps for individuals.  
8 Accessibility and be further developed in two ways:  
9 Education of food stamp providers and through  
10 community outreach.

11 Two, the process of applying for food stamps  
12 should continued to be linked for other welfare  
13 services for those on welfare, but individuals' rights  
14 to obtain food stamps should not be violated as a  
15 result of this linkage.

16 Three, community service organizations and  
17 agencies should be greater utilized in order to assist  
18 in the enrollment and administration of food stamps.

19 Four, children are the majority of Food  
20 stamp recipients, yet often whether they receive food  
21 stamps is contingent upon their parents' performance  
22 in programs such as welfare to work programs.  
23 Conditional care is not consistent with food stamps  
24 purpose of providing assistance to needy families and  
25 children.



1                   Five, the reduction of food stamps --  
2                   (inaudible).

3                   National commitment is necessary and should  
4                   be reinstated in order for interested individuals to  
5                   receive adequate service.

6                   UNDER SECRETARY WATKINS: Thank you.  
7                   Remember, you have an opportunity to provide your  
8                   written comments.

9                   PATRICIA BRODHAGEN: My name is Patricia  
10                  Brodhagen. I am the director of Public and Consumer  
11                  Affairs for the Food Industry Alliance of New York  
12                  State. The Alliance is a statewide trade association  
13                  representing the interests of New York's 21,000 food  
14                  stores. Our members include multi-state chain stores,  
15                  independent grocers, convenience stores and small mom  
16                  and pop neighborhood stores.

17                  We very much appreciate this opportunity to  
18                  submit comments on this important and fundamental  
19                  program. And we are, of course, in all of our  
20                  communities involved in a number of food related  
21                  programs.

22                  Let me begin by saying that grocers of all  
23                  sizes, regardless of the neighborhoods they serve or  
24                  their customer composition strongly support the Food  
25                  Stamp Program and I believe many of the improvements



1       that have been advocated for here this afternoon.

2               We recognize the vital safety net food  
3       stamps provides for those who would otherwise be  
4       forced to go hungry. The Alliance has strongly  
5       encouraged our members to partner with the state  
6       agencies on outreach efforts. In terms of the  
7       programs effectiveness, we applaud the move to  
8       dispense benefits through EBT as a means of improving  
9       efficiency and effectiveness for government, retailers  
10      and recipients. Under EBT a food stamp recipient is  
11      treated like any other customer with a credit or debit  
12      card. The benefit for government food stores is that  
13      you need to insure (inaudible).

14             UNDER SECRETARY WATKINS: Let me just tell  
15      you how much I appreciate you coming a staying here  
16      with us and sitting through all of the wonderful  
17      comments that were made today. We heard some things  
18      here that we had not heard at the other conversations  
19      and I know the interest that you have in trying to  
20      ensure that the program benefits the people who should  
21      receive the program. We heard some reoccurring themes  
22      that we had heard in the other conversations and also  
23      some new issues.

24             I want to especially thank those of you who  
25      have helped us to be able to have such an open way of





1       (inaudible) a process that will move us through the  
2       years ahead of us in this new millennium.

3               I especially want to thank the staff in the  
4       Northeast Regional Office for their support and help  
5       in getting you here today and the advocacy community  
6       that worked so well with us.

7               This is probably the first time since the  
8       early '70s at the beginning of Food Stamp legislation  
9       that we had these kinds of conversations around the  
10      country, finding out what people are thinking and  
11      would like to see us do at this point.

12              We think the time is right to make major  
13      changes to the Food Stamp Program that will be  
14      long-lasting and it may take us through the next 30  
15      years, but I hope the comments that you have made and  
16      the comments that you will hear in the other  
17      conversations around the country will help us to come  
18      up with the kind of proposal that you can rally around  
19      and you can support. It's going to take a lot of  
20      support on everyone's part and it's going to take a  
21      lot of education on the parts of many people to ensure  
22      that we get what we want in the way of the best  
23      program to provide for the nutrition and food  
24      security. And one of our goals with Secretary Gooden  
25      and President Clinton is to eliminate hunger in this



1 country. And we think that's possible, but we also  
2 have to talk about poverty in this country. And  
3 that's the other side of the issue.

4 You have been very patient and we appreciate  
5 that. We moved around a lot trying to accomodate  
6 people who had some schedules that they were trying to  
7 meet and I appreciate your patience in allowing us to  
8 get through the conversation this evening.

9 Again, let me thank you and tell you again  
10 how much I appreciate you bearing with us. And don't  
11 forget, we still have until the end of August to get  
12 your written comments to us so that we can consider  
13 all of the comments, both those that were given as  
14 oral testimony and your written testimony. And any  
15 people that you know of that might be interested in  
16 providing written comments, please ask them to do so.  
17 Again, thank you very much and we look forward to  
18 working with you as we move through this process.

19 Thank you very much.  
20  
21  
22  
23  
24  
25

